# Weird Tales

MAY

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## THE DEVIL'S DOUBLE

*a powerful tale of the ghastly Blue Death*

By PAUL ERNST

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# Weird Tales

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WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH

# The Devil's Double

By PAUL ERNST

*A powerful, blood-chilling thrill-tale about the Blue Death and the world's weirdest criminal, who called himself Doctor Satan*

### 1. The Mad Dancer

IT WAS the middle of an early summer afternoon in Louisville. The sun bathed the streets with hot gold. People thronged the main avenue. Women shoppers streamed in and out of the stores; men hurried on business; traffic rolled in orderly haste.

The middle of a prosaic afternoon. All seemed as it should be. . . .

A town car turned onto the avenue from a side street. It was a big foreign car, speaking of great wealth. Its curtains were drawn.

The town car stopped before a building which was under construction. The sidewalk here was railed off to prevent pedestrians on the walk from being struck by falling bricks. But as the town car halted, a man appeared from the interior of the unfinished building. He walked unobtrusively past the car.

As he passed, one of the curtains over the car windows was raised. A shaking hand came out with a newspaper-wrapped package in it. The man from the building took the package. He walked back into the building again.

The town car's motor raced preparatory to going away. But before it could get into motion, another car with curtained windows swung onto the avenue. This did not stop anywhere. It slowed a little near the town car, but that was all.

However, in the short time of its slowing, it discharged a passenger. Of the hundreds on the avenue, only a few noticed the car, a big blue sedan. Of these few only two or three saw the passenger get out. At first, that was!

A prosaic street, crowded with prosaic people going about their commonplace affairs. . . .

And then, seemingly all at once, they began to stare at the discharged passenger. Once they had seen, they craned their necks to look again, shocked out of all commonplace living by what their eyes were regarding.

The person who had come from the blue sedan was a woman—a girl, rather, scarcely more than twenty. She was tall, maturely curved, strikingly lovely. She had dark hair and great dark eyes, and skin so fair that it looked snow-white in contrast to the blackness of her hair and eyes.

She had descended from the car, run a few paces to get her balance as she hit immovable ground from a moving object, and then stood still in the middle of the avenue, with surprized drivers jamming their brakes to keep from running her down.

For an instant she continued to stand there, in the middle of the street, as if dazed, with traffic a twin river around her. Then cars began to stop on each side of her, and cars and staring crowds began to ring her in.

"What's the matter with her?" a woman snapped. "Is she walking in her sleep?"

"Might be, at that," a man snickered

"A scream suddenly came from his distorted lips."

beside her. "Looks like she's got a nightie on."

Dazedly the beautiful girl looked around at the crowds. And it could be seen that the nightgown simile was not far from the mark.

Sheer strips of some stuff swathed her body, were draped loosely around her legs. That was all she wore, the sheer stuff through which her form could be vaguely seen as through mist.

"What is she—a veil dancer?" snorted another man.

THE traffic cop from the corner began to force his way to the block-up in the center of the square. Like a statue swathed in mist the girl stood in the cleared space. And now the door of the town car opened and an elderly man stumbled out. His eyes were wide with horror. He staggered toward the girl, hands outstretched as though groping his way.

Suddenly the girl moved. She poised one slippered foot and from the folds of gauze that covered her she drew a short,

slim blade. Her voice raised in a shrill, eery incantation, the words of which could not be distinguished. She waved the sword. She began to dance.

"A publicity gag," someone shouted. "She's a sword-dancer after a newspaper write-up."

The crowd laughed and yelled agreement. Some fool began to beat time to the girl's slow, rhythmic steps by clapping his hands. But horror was growing on the face of the elderly man from the town car. And on the face of the cop, as he came nearer through the crowd, was amazement and something like awe.

"It's Jane Ivor," he panted suddenly. "By the saints—Jane Ivor!"

The dancing girl whirled more rapidly, more wildly. Her great dark eyes glittered with lurid fires. She performed her sword dance in the middle of the city's main street with more abandon.

"That's the girl," shouted the man who was clapping time. "If publicity's what you want, you'll get it."

The girl seemed not to hear him—seemed not to hear or see anybody. Her supple left hand tore at her breast, and a strip of the gray gauze enfolding her came loose and floated to the ground, exposing her smooth white shoulders.

"Now you're going to town!" laughed the man who clapped. "More, more!"

"Jane Ivor——" panted the traffic cop, tearing his way forward with ever less ceremony.

"My daughter!" groaned the elderly man from the town car, fighting the heedless mob between him and the girl.

The girl began to sing more wildly. And now the crowd stilled a bit as a few words could be distinguished in her chant, and as more and more of the swathing gauze was torn from her body. People began looking at one another inquiringly.

"Satan . . . my master . . ." some of the words of the girl's chant sounded. "Devil . . . worship. . . ."

The swathing gauze was nearly all on the street now. And a woman cried out a bit as the meaning came home to all. No publicity-seeker would go quite so far. No girl would dare such censure in a mere quest for notoriety.

"Let me through, damn you!" shrieked the elderly man, fighting at the heedless ranks still between him and the girl.

"Get out of the way, you dumbbells," raged the cop, beginning to use his night stick. "Jane Ivor—let me get to her!"

There was stunned silence, in which the girl's chant sounded louder, more weird than ever. Then, like a concerted echo, the crowd repeated the name.

"Jane Ivor! *Jane Ivor!*"

A young man in the outer fringe of the crowd gasped.

"Good God! It *is* Jane Ivor! Most beautiful deb in the city! Daughter of John Ivor, the distilling magnate! Kidnapped a week ago, along with her kid brother! And now she comes back—like this!"

In the cleared spot on the avenue now danced a girl with midnight hair and eyes, who wore nothing but frayed, high-heeled slippers. Her eyes were frenzied as she waved the slim sword above her head and chanted. And now the words of the incantation were only too clear.

*"Satanic Majesty, I worship you. You, the Devil, are my master. Death to your enemies!"*

THE crowd, coming through heedless laughter and growing confusion to something like terror, gave back before the girl's shimmering blade. That sword was obviously razor-sharp, and she was slashing it around with horrifying abandon.

*"The Devil is my master! Death to his enemies!"*

The pirouetting white figure circled the ring of cars and people shutting it in. And then a man yelled.

"My God!—look at her eyes!"

The girl's black eyes seemed about to start from her head. Wild white formed a rim around the pupils.

"She's mad! Get her before she kills somebody!"

*"Satan is my master! I worship the Devil——"*

Screaming now, the crowd that had been laughing rolled back from the girl. The man who had been clapping time, ashen-faced, led the rush. Several other men, with the traffic cop beside them, leaped for her.

*"Back!"* she screamed, slashing with the sword. *"You are enemies of Satan! I will kill all enemies of the Devil!"*

"Jane," cried the elderly man, breaking at last through the milling crowd. "Jane—my own daughter——"

*"Back—I'll kill——"*

The elderly man, sobbing, gasping, fell back from the keen blade that had darted toward his heart.

"Jane—don't you know me? It's Dad!"

*"Back——"*

The traffic cop sprang at her. Like a tigress she stepped away, blade flashing. The cop's face turned sickly as the blade grazed his cheek. And then the others were on her, horrified, deathly afraid of the blade in her mad fingers, but risking their lives to catch the lovely maniac before others in the crowd died to the bite of the blade.

*"Enemies of the Devil! Enemies of the Devil!"*

Her shrill voice was a clarion call, a bugle note of madness. But they got her at last, hands gripping her white flesh firmly, though as compassionately as possible.

The elderly man approached her as she struggled in the grip of the men, who tried to cover her writhing white body with their coats.

"Jane," he groaned. "Look at me, recognize me! It's John Ivor, your father, Jane."

The girl only glared at him out of great eyes in which the whites were lunatic rings around the pupils, and tried to gouge his face with taloned fingers.

"Jane Ivor! Released by the kidnappers—but insane!" the young man breathed. "Wait till I get *that* story into the paper! Insane heiress back from kidnap hell to do nude sword dance in the main street!"

He ran for a phone. And the knot of men holding Jane Ivor, once the city's most popular debutante, went with her to the town car which still stood beside the half-completed building, and put her in it with her white-faced father.

### 2. *Satan's Threat*

THE air was tense, still, in the best private room of Louisville's finest hospital.

Four people were in that room. One, tied with webbed linen to the iron bed, was Jane Ivor. The second was her father, who sat with fingers gripping the edge of his chair till they showed white in the reflected sun-glare from the cream-colored walls. The third was the chief of staff of the hospital, an internationally known psychiatrist. The fourth was a figure such as might have stepped out of a nightmare or a masquerade ball.

This figure was tall, spare. It was cloaked from head to heels in a red garment that enveloped it utterly. Over its face was a cloth mask, also red. On its hands were red rubber gloves, and hiding the head and hair was a red skull-cap from which projected two knobs in mockery of Lucifer's horns.

Keen eyes blazed through the eyeholes of the mask. Steel-gray eyes, icily calm.

The girl with the mad eyes writhed on the bed against the bonds. But her struggles were patently to get to the weird red figure, although in her eyes was stark horror of it.

"Satan," she whispered. "Master. I must serve you."

The figure uttered words which made the red mask move a bit over shrouded lips.

"Yes. I am Satan. And you must serve me. You hear?"

"I hear and I obey," whispered the girl.

"Jane——" faltered John Ivor, in a cracked voice.

The red-garbed figure held up a stern hand. The fingers of that hand seemed shielded in fresh blood as the sunlight caught the smooth red rubber of its glove.

John Ivor, Louisville's richest citizen, bit his lips for silence. The red mask moved with more words.

"You must serve me, even though, perhaps, I be not Satan after all."

For an instant the wildness in the girl's eyes faded a very little. Perplexity, fear, took its place.

"But you are Satan. You told me so, many times. And you told me I must serve you."

"That is true," the red-clad figure droned. "But I may have deceived you. Would it matter if I had deceived you?"

The girl said nothing for an instant. The light of perplexity was still stronger in her lovely eyes, still was robbing the light of madness that had originally showed there. And as it did so, the doctor and the father leaned tensely forward; for perplexity is a thing of sanity, not madness.

"Would it matter if I had deceived you, and was not Satan after all, but only a man?" the red-clad figure said.

The girl answered indirectly.

"You are Lucifer. You told me so. And you told me I must obey you, and kill your enemies. . . ."

"I am sure it would make no difference to you if I were only a man, instead of Satan incarnate," said the masked lips smoothly.

"But you *are* Lucifer——"

It was almost a scream that came from the girl's lips. But, again, there was a subtle difference from that scream and the mad laughter that had come from her lips before.

"Watch," commanded the red-garbed one quietly.

He took off the red rubber gloves, revealing long-fingered hands that were almost inhumanly powerful, but which yet were indisputably human. He removed the skull-cap and mask from his face.

And that face, like the hands, was indisputably mortal. It was a strong face, with level gray eyes under coal-black brows; and with a high-bridged, patrician nose over a long, firm chin.

The girl half rose in spite of her bonds. Her eyes were wide and glazed as they glared at the revealed face. Her cheeks were white with nerve shock.

"You are a man," she whispered in a strangled voice. Then more loudly: "A man! You are only a man! Then I need not serve you! *Oh, God, you're not Lucifer, and you have no power——"*

Her words stopped as though cut with the sharp sword she had waved an hour before. She dropped back to the bed. The doctor rose quickly, and the father gasped.

"She has fainted," said the man in red quietly. "That is all. A tremendous nerve-shock, but she will be all right. And when she comes to, she will no longer be mad. The discovery, as far as she is concerned, that the dread master she thought she must serve is only mortal, will restore her sanity."

The doctor stared at him.

"I can almost believe you, Mr. Keane," he said slowly, "though when Miss Ivor was brought in here I would have sworn nothing could ever cure her madness. Who are you, that you know the mind so well, and know so well the exact thing to do to cure her?"

Ascott Keane shrugged powerful shoulders.

"It doesn't matter who I am." He turned to John Ivor. "We'll leave her here in good hands for a little while," he said. "Shall we go to your home?"

"Yes," breathed the father of the girl who had been mad. "Yes. Anything you say. You have saved my girl. Now, if you could only do something for my boy——"

"That's what we shall talk about," said Ascott Keane.

IN JOHN IVOR'S home on the boulevard, Keane and Ivor faced each other in a quiet library room. The phone had just rung, and word came from the hospital that Miss Ivor had regained consciousness and was indeed sane, though broken by some terrible experience she had gone through and of which she refused to speak. John Ivor's face was still pale, and his hands still trembled; but in his eyes there was a measure of relief.

"Thank God for your arrival!" he said brokenly. "If there is anything I can do to——"

Keane waved his hand.

"Forget that. I'm a wealthy man myself, perhaps richer than you are. Tell me everything about the kidnapping. I think I know most of it, but tell me anyway."

John Ivor sighed brokenly.

"It's hard to speak of it. A week ago today my daughter, Jane, and my son, Harold, started for the country club. Jane was going to play tennis with some friends, and Harold had a golfing engagement.

"They left—and did not come back.

"At six-thirty, an hour after they should have returned, I phoned the club. They had not gone there. No one had seen them, or knew anything about them. I wasn't too much worried, however, till my man came to me with a plain envelope and said there was a message in it left by some man who refused to wait for an answer.

"I opened the envelope and took out the message. It was the one that has been shown in the papers: an announcement that Harold and Jane had been kidnapped and were being held for ransom, the amount of which and place of delivery would be given later.

"I still wasn't sure the letter was anything but the grim prank of some moron, but then the police phoned that they had just found Jane's wrecked roadster. It was in the ditch. And in the car"—Ivor's voice cracked—"was a man's handkerchief saturated with chloroform, and my daughter's racket. With the racket were Harold's golf clubs.

"That night I got a note demanding that I pay one million dollars for the return of my boy and girl. I was to give the money at two in the afternoon, a week from that day, to a man who would receive it at a certain building under construction, where there would be no one on the sidewalk to try to stop him.

"I went to the police with everything. I knew it was risky, but so often kidnappers kill their victims anyway, and go on with their plans as if the victims were still alive, that I thought it more risky to keep the thing to myself."

Keane nodded.

"All as I have read for myself," he said. "Go on."

Ivor bit his lips.

"That much you have read. But there are two things you haven't read—which no one knows about yet.

"One is that I paid the ransom money today, just before my girl was pushed from the blue sedan. The other——"

Ivor mopped his forehead with a trembling hand.

"I didn't have a million in cash where I could get at it. That's a terrific sum, Mr. Keane. I could only get half a million. So I wrapped that up in newspaper, and gave it to the man who came to my town car for it.

"Half a million, Mr. Keane. And the kidnappers gave me back my daughter—*half of the pair they kidnapped!*"

He stared beseechingly, fearfully at Keane.

"No one knew I was going to pay only half the ransom. Yet they came in the sedan with only my girl—somehow knowing in advance that I hadn't the full sum with me!"

He paced the library, while Keane watched him.

"If that were all there was to it, I might think the return of half what I lost, in trade for half the sum demanded, was a coincidence. I might think that the kidnappers were playing the usual double-crossing game—expecting the full million but hoping to get still more by returning only my daughter. But there is more. I found this note in my pocket, thrust there by someone in the crowd, a little while after we'd got to the hospital."

He handed a crumpled bit of paper to Keane, who read:

> John Ivor: When you deliver the other half-million, you shall get your son back. Meanwhile, your daughter's madness shall be your punishment for not giving the full sum in the first place.

The note was unsigned.

"You see?" Ivor said almost pleadingly. "Days ago, the kidnappers knew I was going to give only half the ransom, though not a soul on earth but myself knew that!" He jerked around. "Have you any explanation for that?"

Keane's long fingers touched softly.

"An excellent one," he said. "You wouldn't understand, however. All I will say is that it only confirms my knowledge of the kidnapper."

Ivor gasped. "You know who he is?"

Keane nodded.

"Then — my God, man! — the police——"

"Can do nothing, if it's the person I think it is. Think! *Know!* The kidnapper is Doctor Satan himself. The huge sum asked made me think so in the first place, which is why I came to Louisville from New York when I first read of the affair. The diabolically induced madness was another indication. 'The Devil is my master. I serve Satan.' I knew who had inspired *that* delusion, all right! Now, the apparent magic by which the kidnapper knew you were going to pay only half the demand. Doctor Satan read your mind, my friend."

"Doctor Satan?"

"So the name means nothing to you! I wish it didn't to me." Keane sighed wearily. "He is a man who performs crime for the sheer, icy love of it—a devil if ever there was one. Your daughter in her delusion about having been in contact with Satan himself, was not so far wrong, my friend!"

He strode toward the door.

"Don't tell the police or anyone else my name or my connection with this," he warned. "I want to work alone. Give me twenty-four hours to try to track this man down and rescue your boy."

He nodded and was gone; a man, Ivor thought, like a steel blade; a man to inspire hope when all hope was lost, as he had inspired it in that bizarre and still inexplicable cure of Jane Ivor. . . .

"But of course it was apparent at once what had happened," said Keane a few minutes later.

He was talking to a tall, lovely girl with deep blue eyes and reddish hair, in her hotel suite. The girl was Beatrice Dale, secretary, companion, right-hand man.

"Knowing that Doctor Satan was behind this, we could guess at the source of the girl's madness. Doctor Satan was seen by her only in his crimson costume, of course. In that costume he subtly and deliberately induced madness in her. Therefore, her cure suggested itself: Dress as Satan did, and unmask before her, letting her see that the being she thought the Devil incarnate was only a man after all."

Beatrice was frowning a little. She nodded impatiently.

"Yes, I see how the cure would suggest itself. But why did Doctor Satan drive her mad in the first place?"

Keane sighed. "It was in line with his usual process: A reign of terror among wealthy citizens — then demands for money. Satan kidnapped Jane and Harold Ivor intending from the first to send them back to society incurably and horribly mad. With that as a precedent, no other father would hesitate a minute to part with a fortune to spare madness in his own child!"

Keane's icily calm gray eyes grew colder yet with bitter anger.

"No one knows it yet, including the police—but eight rich men in the city have received notes from Doctor Satan. Each note demands a sum varying from two hundred thousand to five hundred thousand dollars. Each note threatens kidnapping and induced insanity for the child of that man if the money is not paid on demand! Jane and Harold Ivor are but the first of many victims—if we can't stop that red-robed devil!"

Beatrice Dale faced him, cheeks a little pale, a light in her eyes that Keane had never yet really observed,

"So again you go after this man," she murmured. "Ascott, be careful. I feel—this time — that you may not come back——"

Keane's rare smile flashed out.

"Save your sympathies for Satan, Beatrice. This time *he* will be killed, and our work completed!"

### 3. *Road to Hell*

At ten o'clock of the night when Jane Ivor had amazed and then horrified Louisville by doing her mad dance in the open street, a tall man in an enveloping topcoat approached the unfinished building where Ivor had delivered half a million dollars from his town car.

The man had his coat buttoned and the rim of his hat down over his face, though the night was warm. He carried a bundle under his arm.

At the building, on the deserted walk, the man paused. Light from across the street shone on his ice-gray eyes for an instant. Ascott Keane.

Across the street were many people. Before the building there were none. Back from the empty sidewalk yawned the cavernous entrance of the brick shell.

Steps sounded from down the walk. Keane tensed a little and looked at his watch. It was three minutes after ten. In his pocket was a note—one of the eight extortion notes sent to the city's eight leading citizens. The note read:

> If you do not want your son kidnapped and returned a hopeless lunatic, you will deliver four hundred thousand dollars at five minutes after ten tonight at the address given below.

The given address was that of the unfinished building. The signer of the note was Doctor Satan.

Four minutes after ten. The approaching footsteps, slow, leisurely, came yet closer. Keane looked toward them.

For an instant Keane was startled and disappointed. For the maker of the steps

was a uniformed policeman. He had expected anything but that; had expected an accomplice of Satan, perhaps disguised as a tramp, perhaps dressed as a sleek and respectable citizen. . . .

"Disguise," breathed Keane. "But that doesn't necessarily mean as tramp or business man. . . ."

Eyes wide with the thought, he stared harder at the approaching policeman. And then his eyes narrowed and his jaw tensed.

The policeman's eyes were glazed, drugged-looking. He was walking like something moved by a spring—or like a person moving in his sleep. His wide, staring eyes were fixed on Keane as though they didn't really see him.

"My God!" whispered Keane, as the full extent of Doctor Satan's scheme burst home to him. "He's using the police as his messengers now! This man is hypnotized—perhaps drugged first! But what more efficient way of collecting extortion money could be devised than to have a patrolman in full uniform, apparently only walking his beat, pick it up?"

The policeman came nearer, glazed eyes fixed on Keane's face. He slowed as he got to Keane, as if waiting for something.

Keane extended the bundle he carried.

"Have you come here for this?" he said, staring at the man's drugged, vacant eyes.

"Perhaps," the policeman spoke. His voice was thick and pitched in a monotone. "What is in the package?"

"That which will keep Malcolm Tibbet's boy from sharing the fate of Jane Ivor," said Keane.

"The word?" said the patrolman.

Keane was staring into those drugged eyes with all the power of his will, now. And, as a result of his concentrated gaze, those eyes were flickering a bit.

"The word is 'immunity'," he said, quoting the password given in the letter.

For a moment the policeman hesitated. And Keane knew that his brain was struggling to catch the message of the master mind that had hypnotized him. Where was that message coming from? Keane had to find out, and do it through this man.

" 'Immunity' is the correct word," the man said monotonously. "Give me the package. . . ."

His voice trailed off as Keane continued to stare at him, hypnotically, powerfully. His eyes widened and grew perplexed. Slowly but surely Keane's brain was hammering down the wall of hypnosis induced by Doctor Satan previously. But there was going to be a bad moment, Keane realized, when the man was free of Satan's spell and not entirely under his own!

"The package——" the policeman reiterated vaguely. And then his eyes, clearing more and more, blinked as he stared around him, for an instant in full possession of his faculties.

"Hey, what the hell! What am I doing here? Who are you? What's this package you got?"

He stepped a swift pace back from Keane, hand driving for his gun.

"This is the joint where Ivor was to have handed over the kidnap dough! Now you're here with a bundle! *By God, you must be one of the guys*——"

His gun was half drawn before Keane's eyes completed their work. He stood rigidly still in that attitude, gun half out of its holster, face hostile, staring at Keane.

Keane spoke.

"You will do what I command," he said.

The man's breathing had become regular again. His eyes were glazed once

more; but not, this time, from the hypnosis of Doctor Satan!

"I will do what you command."

"You were sent here for this package. Who sent you?"

"A man in red, with a red mask."

"Where did you meet him?"

"He was in a blue sedan. He stepped out of it as I came near. He looked at me a long time, and then told me what to do."

"Where were you to deliver the bundle you got from the man who brought it to this building?"

"To the blue sedan, at the same corner."

He named an intersection toward the eastern limit of the town. Keane's fists clenched. Would Doctor Satan be in that sedan again? If so, he was going to meet him in less than fifteen minutes! And *this* time——

Keane felt of a small, egg-shaped thing he carried gingerly in his coat pocket. Bullets, knife-blades, clubs—these ordinarily lethal weapons could not be used on Doctor Satan. He had means of protecting himself against such crude weapons. But this thing he had in his pocket! That, Keane thought, spelled death for the man!

"We'll go to the blue sedan," he said to the patrolman. "My car is down a block. Come with me to it."

A DARK intersection, with an abandoned factory on one corner throwing black shadow. In the shadow, a blue sedan—the car from which Jane Ivor had been pushed that afternoon.

Keane gripped the egg-shaped thing in his pocket. Then he cursed in his heart as he drew near the sedan with the cop. For there was only one person in the car, and that one was a man on whose face was stupid cruelty, who sat at the steering-wheel.

Doctor Satan himself had not come; he had merely sent a casual accomplice to get the money. Keane's quest of the red-garbed devil who engaged in crime for the love of it as some men hunt big game in Africa, was not to be so easily ended.

The man at the wheel of the sedan eyed the two doubtfully as they drew near. Obviously he had been expecting only the uniformed patrolman; his fingers clutched the gear-shift lever uncertainly when he saw Keane too. But he waited till Keane had got to the car. And that was his mistake.

Keane's eyes bored into his as they had drilled into the cop's. The man blinked uneasily, tried to turn his head as instinct warned him of some danger he could not understand.

"You were to receive a package from this man," said Keane, indicating the policeman. His voice was level, quiet, soothing.

"Yeah," said the driver of the sedan. "But where do you come in?"

"I'm the one who took it to the building. I'm to go with you to your master with it."

The man's lips tightened.

"Oh, no, you're not. You——"

He stopped. His eyes were helplessly held by Keane's.

"You can't——" he mumbled.

His face became stony, his eyes unwinking. Keane got into the car beside him. Then he turned to the policeman, and made a pass with his hand before the other's heavy face.

"Drive!" he snapped to the man at the wheel.

The command was given none too soon. With the passing of Keane's hand across his face, the cop came out of his trance. He saw Keane, really, instead of through a hypnotic mist. He remembered seeing him before, in connection with some suspicious place or happening that he couldn't quite spot at the moment.

"Halt!" he roared, as the car jumped forward.

"Faster," said Keane to the staring driver.

Gun shots sounded from behind. The policeman was trying to shoot the tires of the blue sedan. But they left him behind and sped on, toward the city limits.

"You will drive me to your master," Keane said to the man he had enslaved momentarily to his will.

"I will drive you to my master," the man repeated.

THIRTY miles they went, from the limits of Louisville. They got to a farmhouse that was a tumbledown ruin. Behind it there was a barn, in even worse shape.

The man turned into the drive of the vacant place. He got out of the car. Keane followed. The man went into the barn.

There he walked directly to a mound of hay. There was a bit of wood at the edge of the mound. The man grasped this and pulled it. The hay mound turned, as though resting on a turntable. A square hole was revealed in the barn floor with steps leading down.

"Where does this go?" demanded Keane.

"It strikes a short tunnel that leads into a cave. I don't know where the cave ends. I think it is a far part of the Mammoth Cave system. Anyhow, I know it goes for a long, long way. And somewhere back in it, my master, Doctor Satan, stays."

Keane took a deep breath. He had trailed Satan to many different lairs, but none of them promised to be as appropriate as this. It was fitting that a man masquerading as Lucifer should have his haunt in the bowels of the earth—near Hell, if there were such a place.

The man who had driven him walked down the steps. He touched a projecting stone. The hay mound above slid into place, leaving them in thick darkness.

"Now?" said Keane.

The man pointed. Keane felt his arm go up, looked in the direction of its extended finger. Far ahead, he saw a pin-prick of light.

He turned to the man.

"You will sleep," he said quietly, his hand on the man's arm.

"I will sleep," was the somnolent answer.

Keane felt the man lowering himself to the rock floor of the crude tunnel they were in. He felt him lie down, heard no further movement. Alone, he started toward the pin-prick of light far in the distance—and toward whatever weird place Doctor Satan had fixed down here as his lair.

"A lair near Hell," Keane muttered as he felt his way along toward the distant light. "Please God I can send you to Hell tonight."

### *4. Hell's Anteroom*

THE tunnel down which Keane walked grew constantly lighter. As it lightened, it turned faint rose-colored from the oddity of the light ahead. And now Keane heard a faint roaring from that same light.

He got nearer, and saw that the light across the tunnel ahead of him was not constant; it flickered and twisted, like a great yellow serpent.

Then he saw the nature of it.

Up from the rock floor roared a column of flame at least two yards across. It disappeared through an orifice in the rock ceiling, stretching from floor to top like a solid column, save that it twisted and writhed constantly like the fiery serpent it resembled.

Keane stopped. The rock beneath him

was trembling with the fury of the pillar of fire. The heat blasted at his face twenty feet away. It was a door to what lay beyond the tunnel more forbidding than any portal of steel.

"Natural gas," he muttered.

But a guess as to the nature of the column did not help him pass it. That stopped him, for the moment. But, he reflected, there must be a way to tame the pillar. People passed along here. They couldn't do that if the flame persisted constantly.

He thought of going back and getting as guide the man he had left in hypnotic slumber at the tunnel mouth. But that was not necessary. Even as he thought that, he heard the roar of the pillar diminish a little, felt the rock shake less violently under his feet.

The fiery column was dying down. It burned less brightly as he watched it. It sank till he could see the leaping crest of its top under the low ceiling.

And over that crest he saw a man's head, on the other side. It was a head to induce nightmares. Like a naked skull it was, with unbelievably little flesh to clothe it. In deep eye-sockets, drugged eyes peered forth.

The flame died down still lower. Keane saw the man's body, as skeletal as the head. And as the emaciated body was more and more revealed by the subsiding of the flames, Keane shrank back into a niche in the wall to be out of sight. He opened the bundle he had brought with him.

From the bundle he took the costume he had worn in the hospital to restore Jane Ivor's sanity; red cloak, red mask, red skull-cap, red gloves—point for point a costume matching Doctor Satan's own as Keane remembered it from former encounters.

He donned cloak and gloves, started to put on the mask.

But by now the pillar of fire had sunk below the floor level, down into the hole from which it sprang. It left only a ragged orifice like the mouth of a well in the rock floor. The opening was only about six feet across. Keane, looking around the corner of his small alcove, saw the emaciated man with the drugged, staring eyes, leap this hole and start walking down the tunnel toward where he hid.

There was no time to don the mask and skull-cap. The man was abreast of the niche before Keane could get them on. He stared at Keane in the lessened light of the lowered flame. His mouth opened for a shout.

Keane felled him with a blow to the jaw. There was neither time nor need for subtler measures. He caught the falling, thin body and lowered it to the floor just out of the way of the tunnel itself. Then he put on the mask and the skull-cap with the two projecting knobs in mocking imitation of Satan's horns.

Tall and spare, with the red robe arrogantly draped over his broad shoulders, he stalked toward the hole into which the flame had sunk—an exact replica of Doctor Satan himself. Already the roar of the fiery pillar was increasing again, and he saw the tip of the flames as it started to rise once more to bar the tunnel.

He leaped the two-yard opening. Heat seared him for an instant, threatened to set fire to his robes even in the half-second of his jump. But he got to the other side. . . .

Behind him the fire column rose to the ceiling in its full strength. His way back was cut off. Before him——

Keane looked, and gasped aloud.

He was in a great, low cave, extending before him farther than the eyes could penetrate. Stalagmites, like withered, warped bodies, thrust up from the floor. Stalactites dripped from the low ceiling.

Among the stalagmites half a dozen figures moved; figures no less warped and distorted than the limestone pillars around them.

Keane's eyes narrowed as he looked at them. He had guessed that Doctor Satan had more accomplices here than he normally used in his devilish business; the layout of the place had indicated that. But he had not reckoned on so many, and he had not dwelt on the possible caliber of the accomplices.

Doctor Satan must have scoured the underworld to get these men who were smoothing the floor of the cave, storing supplies, in general working to make of it a permanent and sumptuous base for their diabolical master. Keane had never seen such seamed, degenerate, evil countenances! Why, with the red light from the flame pillar flickering over the weird cavern, and over their twisted bodies, they looked like demons in a real Hell!

Now two of them glanced toward him, and shouted aloud. They straightened, and the others straightened with them. At attention, like ghouls parading before the Devil himself, they waited the orders and coming of the one dressed in Lucifer's red robe.

ARROGANTLY, imitating Doctor Satan's stride, Keane went toward them. And he saw again, in every eye, the glazed look he had seen in the eyes of the policeman and the man who looked like a walking skeleton. Doctor Satan was taking no chances of disaffection or insubordination among the rabble he had chosen to set his evil underground house in order. He had made each of them a slave to his hypnotic will.

"Somewhere back in . . . the cave system . . . my master, Doctor Satan, stays."

So had said the man Keane had come to the caves with. Keane, not glancing at the murderous-looking men who stood at attention, stalked past them and toward the far end of the big cave. But as he went, his mind wrestled with a thought as breath-taking as it was monstrous.

So much like a real Hell, this place looked! So much like actual, inhuman demons appeared the dregs of criminal humanity working in it!

Doctor Satan masqueraded as Satan. Yes, but was it all masquerade? Was it not conceivable that—Lucifer being only a personification and title for the evil passions of men—Doctor Satan was *actually* Lucifer, or as near to it as a being could ever be?

Keane shrugged the thought aside. True or fanciful, it was beside the point; the point being the destruction of the master criminal who had given rise to it.

He got to the end of the big cave at last, and squeezed through a rock opening barely large enough to admit his lean but powerful body, into another smaller cave. And with his entrance into this he instantly leaped sideways and behind a big stalagmite. For in this second cave was everything he had come here to find.

Tensely, cautiously, he peered around the concealing rock cone. . . .

TO ONE side of the cave, which was roughly circular and about fifty feet in diameter, was a legless giant who supported his torso on muscular arms as big as most men's thighs. The man's stupid, cruel eyes blinked toward the center of the cave. This was Bostiff, Satan's main lieutenant in crime since Keane had blasted his other lieutenant, Girse, out of existence. He was looking at two figures in the center of the place.

One of these was a boy of nineteen or so, dressed in expensive clothes which were now wrinkled and stained. The boy's face expressed terror beyond that tolerable to sanity. His wild eyes glared at the figure that faced him with the

fascination in them expressed in the eyes of a small animal hypnotized by a snake.

And this other figure was that of Doctor Satan himself.

Tall and arrogant it towered over the boy, who was Harold Ivor, brother of the girl who had been left, a maniac, on the main street of Louisville. It was garbed in red from head to foot and, point for point, was as like the red-clad figure of Keane, concealed behind the stalagmite, as a reflection of that figure in a mirror.

Only in one detail did the two identical figures differ. The eyes peering through the holes in the mask covering Keane's face were steel-gray. The eyes of the figure towering over the boy were black, lurid, infernal.

"Who am I?" Doctor Satan rasped to the boy.

Harold Ivor, panting, glaring helplessly into the arrogant black eyes, replied: "You are Lucifer."

"You truly believe that?"

"I truly believe that."

Keane, behind his concealing pillar, felt glacial rage flood through him. He had got here just in time to witness Doctor Satan's method of driving his victims mad. He had turned Jane Ivor into a maniac. Now he was doing the same to Harold Ivor. Then the boy would be released in the town as Jane had been—a second horrible object-lesson as to what happened to the children of the rich if their parents did not pay to prevent it.

"Whom do you serve?" rasped Doctor Satan to the lad.

"I serve you, Satanic Majesty. And I will kill your enemies."

There was a silence, while the black eyes of the masked figure stared into the glazed, mad eyes of the boy.

"Bostiff," Doctor Satan said.

The legless giant swung his body toward his master, using the calloused backs of his hands as feet.

"Take him to his prison. Another session like this and he will be ready for release."

"Yes, master."

Bostiff seized the boy's hand, propelled him toward an opening in the cave. He dragged himself after. The two went through the opening.

The red-robed figure in the center of the cave was alone. The red-robed figure behind the stalagmite near the door, drew up to its full height, then stepped out of its place of concealment.

Doctor Satan had been staring at the opening through which Bostiff had gone with Harold Ivor. Now he whirled like an uncoiling spring, and stared at Keane. And in his black eyes was a sudden madness of surprize, hate and rage.

Keane drew near him. He stood before Satan, and the result was fantastic.

Two Satans stood there; two Lucifers, clad in red, red-masked, with Luciferian horns. The Devil and his double! Crimson twins, with death in the eyes of each.

Then Doctor Satan stepped toward Keane with right hand clenched.

"Keane!" he grated. "Again! At every turn I find you—squarely in my path! But this time that path shall lead ahead without obstacles, to limitless power."

"No," said Keane softly, "this time the path shall be blocked, if my dead body must be used to block it!"

### 5. *The Scarlet Twain*

DOCTOR SATAN took a step nearer the figure so closely resembling his own. His black eyes played sardonically over Keane's red cloak.

"So," he grated, "in order to get past my men you imitated my trappings. You made a mockery of the masquerade it amuses me to wear."

Keane shrugged.

"It seemed the easiest way. I was sure

you had many serving you here. I didn't want to kill them. It seemed easier to get past them by trickery."

"And having passed them," said Doctor Satan, "what then?"

Keane's mask stirred to the deep breath he drew.

"This," he said softly. "A thing I think even you are unfamiliar with, Doctor Satan. You will learn of it shortly. And it will be the last thing you ever will learn about!"

His hand went under the red cloak. It came out of his pocket with the weapon he had carried from the hotel—his one weapon, on which he was staking everything.

He opened his fingers and let Doctor Satan see the egg-shaped thing lying on his palm. It was smooth, perhaps two and a half inches long by two inches through. It seemed to be made of gray vitrum.

"Long ago," Keane said, "there were inquiring minds more versed in their own science than our present-day scientists, with their research laboratories and fine equipment, are in theirs. That was the science of Black Art. This is one of the results. I found it in the ruins of a Druid monastery in England."

Doctor Satan stared at the thing in Keane's hand. And as he stared, his black eyes lost their arrogance and became filled with the shadow of dawning fear.

"Where did you . . . get your knowledge of what this is?" he breathed, voice thick. "Why, it is . . . it is the——"

He stopped, and a silence like that of the grave held the cavern.

"It is the Blue Death of Saint Sartius," said Keane. "It was first used in Rome. Then its secret was forgotten till the black ages, when a Druid monk rediscovered it. I have read records of the death of everyone in a certain town in England. The records stated that an odd sort of plague was responsible, but intimated that death was caused by some of these."

His fingers clenched over the vitreous shell.

"Sarlfolk," whispered Doctor Satan hoarsely. In his black eyes was a fear he had never shown before. "I have read the records, too. The town of Sarlfolk—depopulated overnight and never occupied again—But that can't be the Blue Death you hold in your hand! Its secret was again lost when England was still a wilderness with men like animals populating it."

Keane's masked lips moved in a bleak smile. He raised the egg-shaped thing in his hand.

"You'll find out," he said.

And he threw the thing with all his force at the feet of Doctor Satan!

SATAN screamed. It was the first scream of terror that had ever come from the shielded, perpetually hidden lips. He leaped back from the object that had burst like a tiny bomb save that no explosion accompanied it. But quick as he was, he had acted too late.

Keane had thrown it so that it burst to pieces between him and the only two openings from the cave—the one into which Bostiff had taken Harold Ivor, and the one through which Keane had come. And with the instant of its bursting, the vitreous egg had emitted that which rose as a barrier to those exits.

From the broken shell a bluish, heavy mist rose rapidly and moved toward Satan as though acting with a will and intelligence of its own.

Another scream tore from Satan's shielded lips. He was probably the only man on earth, aside from Keane, versed enough in the occult to know what terror it was that crawled toward him. But he knew well enough!

The bluish mist spread with the rapidity of flame devouring straw. It poured

from the broken shell like a rolling wall. And it formed in a half-circle around Satan, forcing him back toward the rock wall of the cavern.

In Keane's eyes was the glitter of triumph long delayed.

"You'll know now some of the anguish you've caused others," he said savagely. "You'll know some of the torment endured by the men you've killed—some of the mental torture being undergone at this moment by the parents of the children you've threatened. I could feel sorry for anyone facing the Blue Death of Saint Sartius, but not for you."

There was a shuffling sound at the entrance through which Bostiff and Harold Ivor had gone. Bostiff had reappeared. He swayed in the doorway, eyes glinting with brute surprize as he saw two red-robed figures where only one had been before, and with fear as he saw without understanding the blue fog that was rolling toward the one he recognized instinctively as his master.

*"To me!"* Doctor Satan screamed. *"Bostiff——"*

The legless giant turned, snarling, toward Keane. Then he turned back obediently toward Satan and began hitching his body toward the blue fog on his hands.

"No!" breathed Keane in something like horror as the legless man hitched forward. But he did not utter the word aloud. Bostiff was as evil as his master, limited only by his own thick-wittedness. He deserved death as well as Satan.

Bostiff reached the edge of the blue fog, paused, then groped a little into it.

A scream suddenly came from his distorted lips. And the fog, touching him, underwent an instant change.

From being a sort of mist, it became a clinging, viscous shroud. Bostiff began wrenching and tearing at it as it poured itself swiftly over and around him. The viscous shroud grew more opaque, palpably harder. It was as though the legless man were suddenly encased in frosted blue glass.

His hoarse shouts died in volume. Through the blue opacity his staring eyes, like the eyes of a man caught under ice and swimming desperately under water to find the hole he fell through, peered out.

"Master! Save me!"

The shout could barely be heard. And in any event Doctor Satan wasn't listening. Nor could he have done anything if he had.

The blue mist had reached him now. It circled him closer as he crouched against the rock wall as though trying to force his body into it. It touched his face. . . .

Doctor Satan's hands were up, fingers extended in a cabalistic sign. His lips were moving the red mask over his face as they chanted a ritual not heard by human ears for fifty generations.

And as he watched, perspiration studded Keane's face under his mask. The blue fog was slowing a little. Was it possible that Satan could evade *this* death?

But the fog, halting for a moment with the cabalistic signs and the incantation, surged forward again. Incredibly, the mist-like stuff grew what seemed to be horrible tentacles. The shreds of them wrapped around Satan's red-sheathed arms and dragged them down.

A few yards away, Bostiff was now only a cocoon of a thing lying moveless on the floor. Even his ghastly, staring eyes could not now be seen. The fog portion that had wrapped around him had hardened like the vitrum of which the shell of the egg-like object containing it had been made. Keane repressed a little shudder. Such a fearful death! . . .

Doctor Satan was down now. Over him, as it had over the legless man, the blue mist was becoming a viscous, sticky sheath. But Satan had stopped screaming.

Keane saw his black eyes glisten through the mask with fearful intensity of thought.

Next moment Keane found out what the thought had been directed at.

A man stepped through the narrow portal into the first cave off the flame. Another man followed, and another. Six men lined before the opening and began to advance on Keane. Slaves of Satan's hypnotic will, they had been called silently, from this distance.

KEANE exclaimed aloud, though not in fear of his own safety; the summoning of these comparatively stupid mortals was a futile last gesture, as Satan must have known in his extremity. The thought that wrenched the cry from Keane's lips was the fear that by sheer numbers the men might defeat the death he had brought here for the red-robed fiend he had struggled against so long.

The Blue Death could surround and kill only a limited number of bodies! True enough, the ancient records hinted that the Blue Death had killed all the inhabitants of the old town of Sarlfolk. But if that were so, a great deal more of it must have been released than had been carried here in Keane's egg!

The deadly blue mist would attack every moving thing within range save the being that directed it! But it took a definite amount of it to kill. It now surrounded two forms. If it divided to surround six more—would there be enough to kill them all?

For once in his life, Keane wished he had a gun. In his deadly resolve to overcome Doctor Satan at all costs, he would have shot these men, because their dead bodies would not have drawn aside any of the fatal mist. But he had no gun, and he could not attack six men bare-handed. Biting his lips, he could only watch what took place.

Meanwhile, the six men, hypnotized by Doctor Satan and acting blindly according to his will, sprang at Keane. With an athlete's quickness, he dodged their concerted rush. Two of them plunged into the Blue Death, already rolling toward them. One, laying hands for an instant on Keane, he flung into the ominous fog. The other three started to attack a second time, and stopped like ice-sheathed statues as the Blue Death reached them.

Keane's breath came between his clenched teeth in a ragged hiss. Eight bodies were cased in the viscous blue stuff which the mist became when it touched flesh! They lay like cocoons on the rock floor, some motionless, some feebly writhing, but all things of horror and despair.

Keane went to the form which still showed a little reddish through the blue crust over it—the form of Doctor Satan.

Terror-filled, dulling black eyes stared at him through the fearful sheath. Red-gloved hands raised a little, crackling the blue stuff that cased them, in a final gesture of malediction. Then they fell and the black eyes closed.

"Thank God!" breathed Keane, voice harsh and cracked.

The fight was over. He was sure. To make doubly sure, he would have liked to strangle that stark form; to have clubbed its head in. But he dared not touch the blue shell. That would have meant death for him, though he himself had released it.

He went to the opening through which he had seen Harold Ivor taken. The boy was beyond, in a small cave like a prison room. He was cowering against the wall, and he shrieked and threw up his hands as Keane entered in his red masquerade.

Keane dragged off his mask, and threw back his red hood. The boy stared as Jane Ivor had stared.

"You're—you're a man?" he sobbed. "You're not——"

Keane smiled, and in that smile was a gentleness that erased the fear from the boy's face.

"I am not Satan," he said. "There is no Satan—at least, none to frighten you any more."

As Jane Ivor had done, her brother, Harold, swayed in the beginning of a fainting fit from shock. But he had not been as far driven in madness, yet, as his sister had been. He reeled from the shock, but he did not lapse into unconsciousness. And after a moment he came to Keane, trembling hand outstretched.

Keane grasped it.

"Come," he said. "We'll leave here. We'll leave this Hell, and the demons in it, and its master—all dead——"

But then, as he got to the door, a hoarse shout was wrung from his lips. He leaped to the spot where Doctor Satan had been lying, eyes wide with a shock of astonishment that almost unnerved him.

The spot where Doctor Satan had lain was empty. His blue-sheathed form was no longer there. And over the bodies of the seven who had served him, the blue casing was a little thicker.

"Damn him," raged Keane, trembling fists raised. *"Damn him!"*

Satan had gathered the remnants of that icy, terrific will of his while Keane was away with the boy, and had, out of his own fragmentary knowledge of Saint Sartius' Blue Death, contrived somehow to divert its hardening shell from his own body and onto the others that lay near by.

That was obviously what had happened. But, sick with defeat when victory had been tasted, Keane refused entirely to believe it till he got to the anteroom cavern with Harold Ivor.

The flaming pillar was down. Someone had just passed this way and had hurdled the well-mouth opening from which the fire hissed.

Had that someone hurdled it feebly, barely dragging his body up the opposite edge? Keane thought so. For on the far edge of the small abyss was a single, torn, red glove.

But, feebly or not, Doctor Satan had escaped from the caves. Again he had cheated the death to which Keane had driven him closer than he had ever been before in his satanic existence.

The flame pillar was already rising again.

"You must jump that hole," Keane said to the boy.

He set the example. The youth followed. Clinging to Keane's hand, Harold Ivor went with him down the outer tunnel.

The concealed trap-door above was open, as Satan had left it, too hard-pressed and weak to bother to shut it after him. Under the door the man Keane had hypnotized after his use as guide had been no longer needed, lay stretched on the floor. Eyes open and blank, he slept the sleep from which there is no awakening save by the action of the one who induces that sleep.

Keane started toward the man, then stopped. He was a human rat. The emanations from his hazed mind caught by Keane's superhuman psychic perception whispered that he was at least once a murderer, perhaps twice or thrice.

Face bleak, Keane went on past him with the shuddering boy. He left the man sleeping there. . . .

Outside, in the driveway of the abandoned farm, the blue sedan was gone. Keane bit his lips as he visioned the swaying, raging figure in red at its wheel,

speeding off somewhere into the night—to strike at humanity again when he had recovered.

Somberly, with his shoulders drooping, Keane started toward town with the boy. He had stopped the reign of terror in Louisville—but his real work was not yet done.

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# The Room of Shadows

By ARTHUR J. BURKS

*Those of you who love to revel in a powerful, horrifying and utterly fascinating weird story will find this vivid novelette exactly to your taste*

### *1. The Woman of the Black Sash*

I CAUGHT a peculiar odor in the room as the boy grinned strangely at me, dropped the key on the bureau and went to the outer door. He didn't wait for the usual tip, and I didn't like the way he licked his lips. Those lips were too red, and the eyes too black, too deeply sunken. And the odor I had smelled! . . . Well, I'd been around a bit and knew the odor: in all lands the same, the cheap scents of women lacking in good taste.

But this was in one of New York City's most exclusive hotels. Exclusive, yes, but popular.

"We'll have to give you an inside room, Mr. Clerc," said the man at the desk, "but you won't mind, I'm sure, and in a couple of days you may have your old room back."

I signed the registration slip, Adam Clerc, with a flourish. I don't think I'd have been quite so cocky if I had known what faced me.

I felt something distinctly *other* the second I entered the room, and I'm not usually sensitive to impressions, because I don't believe in their original stimuli. I believed only in what I could hear, feel, see or taste.

To begin with, it had been broad daylight outside. And here the lights had to be turned on immediately. There was one window, in the corner of the room, which gave on a dark well-court that seemed to be filled with eddying soot. There was a light in the ceiling which appeared to be strangely blurred, to possess some reflecting property that caused shadows, especially my own, to look queerer, more distorted, than even shadows usually did.

The one standing lamp merely threw a circle of light on the floor below the shade, while the light which went upward to make a circle on the ceiling . . . well, there was something queer about that, too. For there was a little shadow on the ceiling, in the center of that light. I studied the shadow; it looked like the silhouette of a small dog, a sleeve-dog.

I shivered without understanding why. The bellhop had opened the window which gave on the black court, and I closed it hurriedly. Cold seemed to be

"Together again, as all of us will be down the centuries to come."

rising out of that court; which was silly, of course, because the air was really balmy. Yet I felt the cold. I had the feeling that the black soot which seemed to fill the court—nothing but the shadows of high, surrounding buildings—hid something, something that could see without being seen, could see *me!*

But why worry? This was New York City, less than a block from Times Square, and I had never been afraid of anything.

On a hunch I lifted the receiver from the hook, asked for the desk.

"I wish," I told the desk man, "that you'd send that same bellhop back to me."

"Bellhop, Mr. Clerc?" There was surprize in his tone. "I don't understand you. Don't you remember? You have been a guest here so frequently that I simply gave you the key and you let yourself into your room."

I figured the fellow must be drunk or jesting. But he couldn't be jesting; for nobody, certainly no hotel flunky, had ever been humorous with me, not with Adam Clerc.

A cold chill circulated in the room.

The shadows in the corners, as I clicked up the receiver thoughtfully, seemed to move outward. I drew my neck deeper into my shirt collar. I had taken off my tie, opened the buttons on my shirt. Now I buttoned the shirt again, put the tie back on. Small things, you say; yet small things could be so terrifying.

*Small things!*

I wondered many times, later, why I should have thought of *small things*.

"The whole thing is deucedly queer," I thought. "I saw that boy distinctly, and I haven't had a drink in two years! There's something peculiar somewhere, no doubt about that."

I was young, resilient, a fighter. I could have demanded a change of rooms, without giving a reason, but I became stubborn. If there were a mystery here I would find out what it was.

THE telephone rang. There is no personality, no character, about a telephone bell; yet there was a hint of mockery, of vague laughter, in this one. Of course it would be from the desk, for nobody knew I was at this hotel — the David Crocker. Yet I hesitated to take down the receiver.

It was a man's voice, and it wasn't from the desk.

"Is this Adam Clerc? The explorer?"

"Who's calling him?" I asked, irritably.

The man chuckled, and did not answer directly.

"Is Carla Miller there?"

"No!"

Again that chuckle, which made my hackles rise somehow.

"Is Dee Janey there?"

"No!" I almost shouted it. "I've never been in this room before. If it was occupied before now by——"

I clicked up the receiver, paused for a moment, then signaled the switchboard.

"Listen, sister," I said, "some man is calling here, asking for women. Head off calls after this, unless someone asks for me, understand? Just because this room was occupied by dames before——"

"But, Mister Clerc," there was distress in the girl's voice, "no one has telephoned you since you registered. I'm sure of it!"

That certainly got under my skin. The shadows had crept closer. I put my hand against my heart. I felt a little dizzy. My heart was hammering loudly. I took a deep breath.

"For Pete's sake!" I said.

Then I stiffened. I wasn't accustomed to recurrent cold chills. They irritated me; especially when, after hanging up the receiver, my attention whirled on the door by which I had entered. A key was being fitted into the lock. Someone was trying to get in.

I hadn't set the night lock. It could, of course, be the maid, though she would ordinarily not come to my room until after nine o'clock tomorrow morning.

I HEARD the lock click. Whoever it was had the right key and the right room. At that instant, out of the black court, rose a sound that got under my skin. It was the long-drawn howling of a dog. Now, there is ordinarily nothing frightening about a dog's howls. Just the same, this one set my teeth on edge, my skin to crawling, as though there were tiny white worms below the epidermis. I was unaccountably glad that the window was closed, locked. I turned again to the door.

A gorgeously beautiful woman entered. Her hair was as black as a rain cloud, snug above a face that was as arresting as any I had ever seen. Her eyes were as black as her hair and deeply brooding. Little fires seemed to glow far down in them. She entered the room with the sweeping, silent grace of a pantheress.

Her feet, I noted, were sandaled, and white skin showed. Her toe-nails were as black as her hair or her eyes. Her finger-nails, too, were tinted black. Her dress was white, all of it, with a black sash holding it against her body—that would have sent Praxiteles into mute rapture. I caught my breath, started to speak to her.

She looked right through me. She moved ahead as though she believed herself alone. And from the court below the dog howled again.

The woman—girl rather—was unfastening the knot which held that black sash about her body. Good heavens, didn't she see me?

I didn't know, but I breathed a sigh of relief when she entered the closet and shut the door behind her. I had no aversion to looking upon a woman unclothed, but there was something here I didn't understand, many somethings!

I heard rustling sounds in the closet; then the door opened and the girl came out. . . .

This time the black sash was gone, the white garment was gone, the sandals were gone. . . .

She went into the bathroom, shut the door.

Again the dog howled from the sooty court.

I dashed to the window, swept it open, and the dog's howling came to me like a bullet, up out of the court, a thrown missile. It crashed against my ears. It hammered against my ear-drums. There was menace in it.

I had heard dogs bay the moon. I had listened, deep in many nights, to the howling of wolves of all kinds. But I had never been as afraid as I now was, with the mournful howling of that invisible dog from the well-court.

I caught up the first thing I could lay my hands on, which happened to be a telephone book, and hurled it down into the court. I heard it strike something. I had aimed at the spot whence I was sure the howling had come. I heard the book strike flesh, I'd have sworn. But no yelp answered, just a repetition of the strange howling.

I felt the sweat break out all over me suddenly, and had never in my life been so much afraid. I stared at the closed door of the bathroom, out of which came no sound whatever.

"Deucedly queer," I thought.

Then, strangely, the latch on the bathroom door loosened, and the door started to swing open inward. No light was on in there, though I had left it on myself. Just a gaping rectangle of utter dark. That darkness seemed to be trying to edge around the door, as though it had been a monster intent on attacking me.

I licked my lips, to find them suddenly dry, almost parched. I rubbed my forehead, just now conscious of a splitting headache. What was going on here, anyhow?

I got up with a greater show of bravery than I felt—feeling the necessity for courage in my own eyes as I passed the full-length mirror—and started for the bathroom door. I saw myself in the mirror strangely. My features were blurred, unnaturally white. My hair was awry.

I passed the mirror quickly, averting my head, wondering what I had eaten to cause me to feel as I did.

I went to the bathroom door, which now hung entirely open. I cleared my throat.

"Is anything wrong, Miss?" I asked.

No answer. No sound. No movement. The shadow in the bathroom, the inner darkness, was a black wall barring my entrance, even if I had elected to enter. Terror flowed at me from the dark of an ordinary, modern, hotel bathroom. Swear-

ing, I put my left hand in, turned on the electric light.

That bathroom was unoccupied!

Nobody had passed me going out. There was no possible other way out of the bathroom, except, of course, through the drain in the bottom of the tub, where there were apertures into which, perhaps, I might possibly have thrust my little finger. I swore fiercely.

And the dog's howling now, from the black court, made me think of a maniac's laughter at a madman's jest.

I dashed to the closet where the mysterious black-haired woman had disrobed, looked in.

Hanging neatly on a hanger, beside my own clothing, was the white garment. Looped over it was the black sash.

If, by some weird necromancy, the girl had left the room when I hadn't been watching, or during some mental hiatus common to absent-minded men, she had gone partly clad into the hallway of a crowded, *exclusive* hotel!

It was little wonder, I fancy, that my brain was in a whirl, as though being churned by maggots.

I took the steps two at a time, down to the desk. There, panting, I waited for the clerk to come to me. I had to regain control of myself, for the lobby was filled with people. After all, this was modern, present-day New York, and I wasn't drunk. Somehow the presence of people was reassuring.

Two men bumped against me at the desk, stared in amazement, as though, the poor fools, they couldn't see me, and went on, muttering to themselves and shaking their heads. What ailed this place, anyhow?

The clerk finally came, to look at me questioningly. I stared at him, my fear growing. He wasn't the same clerk at all. He was the bellhop who had taken me to the room of the shadows, and his eyes were deep wells of mysterious mockery!

### 2. *Little Things*

"LOOK here," I said to the fellow, "what kind of a dump is this, anyhow? I've been a guest of this hotel off and on for five years and never ran into anything like it before. Dogs barking in the court. Men calling and asking for girls."

There was a shocked look on his face, though his eyes still were mocking, as though he knew something he could tell me if he would.

"Mr. Clerc!" he protested. "This hotel has a reputation."

I interrupted to tell him everything. He shrugged, beckoned me to follow him to a side door off the lobby. I went. He pointed to the well-court, in which there were no shadows whatever. The sun fell into the court and it was like a tropic midday for brilliancy. There was just one thing that made it seem like the court I had seen from my window. The telephone book I had thrown. . . .

"And we don't allow dogs at the David Crocker, sir," the boy—clerk rather—said again. "Are you sure you're all right?"

I'd have taken the hint, blamed it all onto delusions caused by something I had eaten, but for one thing—the hidden, mocking laughter in his eyes.

I whirled, went back in, and to the switchboard.

"I called you a while ago, sister," I said, "and told you to refuse to connect people calling my room. You told me nobody had called. . . ."

"That's right, Mister Clerc, nobody has called since you came in!"

"Either," I muttered, "you're drunk or I am, and I haven't had a drink."

There was inexpressible shock on her face. Spinsterish spectacles, drab, black clothing, frizzled hair, didn't somehow

go with an accusation of drunkenness. I mumbled a quick apology, went back to my room. But the closer I got to it, along the hallway whose carpet muffled my footfalls, the slower I walked. I didn't know why. I just knew that I looked forward to entering that room with inexplicable dread; I also knew that if I asked to be changed to another room with the riddle unsolved, I'd always hate myself.

I forced myself to enter the room.

Only, now it was utterly dark—and I hadn't turned off the lights. The door slammed behind me, caused by some breeze through the hall, I supposed, and I was alone in the utter dark—*and that dog was howling again from the well-court!*

Nor was that all. Warm, soft arms went around my neck. I was pressed forcibly against a pulsating body, that of a woman, I guessed, almost as tall as I was. Fragrant perfume, heady, overpowering, was in my nostrils. Hot lips that were soft, that called to something primeval, deep down inside me, were pressed against my own. Terror shifted the hair on my scalp, even as the arms went around me. It was still there, and growing, as the kiss seemed to burn into my very soul, as the soft hot lips moved against mine, as the body of the unseen clung to me.

Terror mastered me. I knew that deadly danger was in the arms, in the kiss, in the fragrant, heady perfume. But, knowing, my arms went out, around the woman. I knew without a word being spoken that it was the woman of the black sash.

I heard her whisper against my ear!

"Adam! Adam Clerc!"

Her voice was like a cool hand on my body. It caressed me, kissed me, that voice.

"Adam! Adam Clerc!"

She moved against me. Somehow she had slipped from my arms, however, and was somewhere away from me, there in the dark room, whispering:

"Adam! Adam Clerc!"

Her whisper came from somewhere near. I reeled in the direction of the sound. I stumbled against the standing lamp, and inspiration came. I had to see this woman. I had to see her black eyes looking into mine. . . .

I SWITCHED on the light. There was whirling of black mist in the room, no more. The window giving onto the ebon well-court was part-way open at the bottom. The black stuff seemed to be vanishing through the slit under the window.

I raced to the bathroom again, to find it as empty as before. I whirled to the closet, to find that the white garment and the black sash had vanished. The girl had disappeared again, and she couldn't have got through the outer door past me. I'd have seen her when she opened the door.

There was one other way—the open slit of a window, the black mist going out—and, of course, the mysterious exit from the bathroom which she had used once before.

"Who are you?" I shouted. "Where are you? What's going on? Come back! Come back!"

The only answer came in the howls from the well-court, the howls that were like mocking laughter.

But now the light was on. The shadows in the room seemed alive, and out of them the whisper kept coming:

"Adam Clerc! Adam Clerc!"

I had to find some semblance of sanity here, or go stark, staring mad. I raced to the mirror past which I had hurried, unaccountably, earlier in the evening, and stared at myself.

My face was white, drawn, the skin taut over the cheekbones. I looked as

though I hadn't eaten or slept for days and nights on end. My eyes were deep-sunken.

Then I leaned closer. I had noticed something on my neck, a pair of little red dots. They were oozing blood. They were so situated that they looked like the punctures the fangs of a poisonous reptile might have made. But I had had no sensation of having been bitten by anything. I had, I decided, scratched myself in a sort of frenzy.

I whirled back to that window as a thudding sound broke on my consciousness. The window had dropped shut with a sound of grim finality. The whirling black mist had entirely vanished, unless the shadows in the corner were part of it.

The barking of the dog was muted now by the closed window. But was it?

I stood there, staring at the window. No, the sound wasn't muted. It was rising . . . actually, rising to my window, as though the dog had taken wings. That was silly, of course, but there it was. No mistaking the howling sound, nor the fact that the sound was approaching. What filled me with terror was this: my room was four stories above the street, and above the level of the well-court . . . and yet . . .

I stared through the window. That black court was black again, and I knew it had always been, always would be, black when viewed from this window—if viewed by Adam Clerc.

There was something on the window-sill—something small, inexpressibly ferocious, savage-eyed! I looked. Blazing eyes looked back. They might have been the eyes of a mad lobo wolf, or a giant Newfoundland with the rabies, but never of the tiny creature that stood out there, on the sill, staring at me, snarling, and emitting the howls I had heard from the courtyard.

For, listen!

The dog's hot nose was against the window-pane. He wasn't standing *along* the sill, but across it — and there was plenty of room for him! I had seen plenty of Chinese sleeve-dogs in my time, but never one so small as this one.

And he was barking and snarling at me—and the giant sound, coming from a creature so tiny, filled all the well-court with rocketing echoes.

And yet, I heard blaring radios all through the David Crocker, and no one else seemed to be bothered by the snarling, howling dog. I started for the window, feeling myself in the presence of a horror that was utterly incomprehensible.

No canine body so small could possibly hold such gigantic fury, no lungs emit such wolfish howlings. Yet there it was. It was only a small dog, after all. I'd open the window, bring it in. The echoes from the court had fooled me. Some neighbor, perhaps, had allowed his sleeve-dog to go out onto a neighboring sill, from which he had hopped to mine. But that didn't explain the gigantic fury of the beast, nor the might of his howls.

I found, then, that I hadn't the courage to open that window. I couldn't have done it for all the gold in the world. That fury out there could somehow destroy, annihilate me. I knew it, even as I knew it was impossible. . . .

I WAS almost knocked off my feet by a furious, unexpected attack from behind me. I whirled as tiny teeth sank into my back, my thighs.

My room was filled with sleeve-dogs! They had come from somewhere, absolutely in silence, and had attacked me. I stared at them as I kicked out. I grabbed one of the little things in my two hands, which were far too big to hold him, and his savagery was a challenge which drove me mad. I twisted his savage little head from his shoulders, flung him to the floor,

where he rolled under the bed, head and all. But even as I slew him, his eyes stared into mine, with mockery in them, as though he laughed at me through his snarls.

Horror nestled against my heart then, enclosing it in cold tentacles that were beyond expression; for the instant I slew that dog, while others attacked and bit me, I had the ghastly impression that it wasn't the eyes of a dog which looked into mine, but the eyes of a human being!

Great God! Just once I had looked into such eyes — just once. And they hadn't looked into mine. They had looked past and through me. They had been the eyes of the woman with the black-sashed white garment. . . .

I dashed to the door and out, slammed it shut behind me, leaned against it, panting, and looked about me, ashamed lest someone see how badly frightened I was. Someone did see: a woman, through the crack in an adjoining door that stood ajar. I spotted the door, flung myself toward it as it started shut, struck it savagely, sprawled on the floor of a strange room.

"May I ask the meaning of this intrusion?" said a cold voice.

I stared at the woman, who was dressed for the street, and my heart turned a somersault. There was no mistaking her. She was the woman of the black sash. I would have sworn that she was the woman I had just held in my arms. But in her eyes there was no slightest sign of recognition, not even a flicker.

Cold, distant, aloof. Obviously she considered me an intruder. But one thing she couldn't hide, one thing that made us kin in spite of anything that could have happened: abysmal fear, deep down in her black eyes.

I clutched her shoulders.

"Tell me about it! Tell me, do you hear? *What about the dogs in that room?*"

The coldness left her, the fear took possession, ghastly, horrible fear. She would have fallen if I hadn't clutched her, lowered her into a chair.

"Oh, my God!" she moaned. *"The little things are back! The little things are back!"*

### *3. Eda*

I CAUGHT her by the shoulders and shook her until her teeth rattled. Her eyes, big with terror, never left mine for a moment.

"You know something about it!" I told her. "I've got to know — for my own peace of mind I've got to know, do you understand? What are the 'little things' you keep mentioning? What do you know about that room?"

"Little things? Little things?" she repeated dully. "But of course! The dogs. The sleeve-dogs. The tiniest in the world, lots of them; the kind *he* had raised, trained——"

"He? He? Whom are you talking about? One of us, maybe both, are crazy. I've got to know. I never ran into a mystery yet that I didn't solve. Whom do you mean by 'he'?"

"Lun Yurka, the Eurasian! He used to have that room. That's where my sister lived when I last heard from her. I've been here since, wondering if I might not get some hint——"

I shook her again.

"Begin from the beginning," I demanded, "and make it snappy and to the point."

"Lun Yurka, the Eurasian, as white as you or I, used to have that room. He dealt in . . . women. My sister Maida was one of them. My own name is Eda Noonan. When I didn't hear from her I came here, got another room, managed to get a pass-key. Maida was . . . well, maybe you understand. . . ."

"The kind of a girl men call over a telephone?"

"Yes, but not as you think. Strange, *unearthly* men. She *couldn't* be different. A wild streak in her. She didn't even try. She was somehow other-worldly in her mad desire for excitement. But I loved her, the whole family loved her. We didn't even condone her, because it wouldn't have made the slightest difference. In her mind there was nothing to condone. She had to do the things she did. Then she vanished. I've always believed she was murdered. I've sneaked into that room, the horrible, grisly room, and waited for a sign, for the telephone to ring. It was rung, there have been men's voices. . . ."

"I know. I know. And what else?"

"The little things. The barking of dogs in the well-court, when I know there are no dogs there. Lun Yurka had such dogs, ferocious, horrid little creatures. I've even thought . . . you see, Maida hinted in letters, of strange, ghastly things happening to other girls who were pawns of Lun Yurka. Of girls disappearing, of new sleeve-dogs coming . . . sleeve-dogs with the animal ferocity of wolves. I think she must have been taking dope, for she hinted that the vanishing of girls, and the appearance of sleeve-dogs, were too close together. . . ."

I couldn't help it. A cold chill, as from a glacier, caressed my spine. My hair shifted oddly on the back of my neck. Terror was an invisible blanket of many layers, fluttering over this girl, Eda, and me.

"Listen," I said, "while I tell you something. . . ."

I didn't think it would be a surprize to her, and it wasn't; but it frightened her even more, if that were possible. I told her of entering my room, of taking a woman in my arms. I told her everything, of the kiss. . . .

"Oh, my God!" she said. "Oh, my God!"

"Were you in there?" I demanded.

"No!" she moaned. "No! No! And yet——"

"Yet what?"

"I was sleeping in this room, with the door locked. I dreamed that I rose, went into *that* room. I didn't seem to open any doors. I seemed merely to go through them. I was in the dark. I felt the presence of a man. I couldn't seem to help myself. I was in a daze, wherein nothing seemed to matter. I dreamed—Mother of God!—exactly what you have told me. And then I came back here."

"Let me see your negligée!" I snapped.

She started to rise, to go to a closet, but was unable to complete the task. I went to the closet myself, and there hung the white garment with the black sash. I took it down, held it in front of her. She covered her face with her hands.

"That's all I could find," she said brokenly, "that belonged to Maida. I found it in the room."

"But doesn't the maid ever clean up when a guest leaves?"

"That room is always rented," was the surprizing answer. "I don't know why you were put into it."

I had an idea. I took my key from my pocket, then gasped. The room in which these queer things had been happening was 426. The key tag said 428! Yet 428 had opened 426. I'd got into the wrong room somehow.

My brain was in a whirl. How had I got into that room? I shook the hysterical girl again.

"This Lun Yurka, what did he look like? Did you ever see him?"

"Yes. He walked up to me when I came into the hotel lobby the first time, called me by name, and told me I'd better leave—or I would die!"

"What did he look like?" I demanded.

She described him carefully, while little ants crawled along my spine, seeming to increase in numbers as she spoke; for the man she was describing was the bellhop who had taken me to that room, the clerk who had shown me a well-court empty of dogs of any kind.

"And this Lun Yurka," I said, "where is he now?"

"That's the terrible thing," she said. "He was shot to death, right in the hotel lobby, within twenty minutes of his warning to me! Nobody ever knew who did it, but someone said a girl had run from the place, screaming, looking down at something on the floor nobody else could see, and shrieking: *'The little things! The little things! Take them away!'* "

I shook her again.

"We've got to look at this thing calmly," I said. "I don't know what's going on. You've lost a sister. You're trying to find some trace of her. I've got a mystery to solve. Besides, whoever that woman really was, I learned one thing when I kissed her: she's another mystery I have to solve, and I'll solve it if it takes until I die. Whatever you may have dreamed, that girl was flesh and blood, understand."

She stared at me out of her deep black eyes. Her lips were red, red as ripe cherries.

"You're not afraid?" she asked. "I'm sure it means death. I've dreamed of the little things, and always there was death in them. If that girl you mention" — she shuddered, recalling her dream, and I winced because she shuddered at the recollection — "was real, how did it happen that the window was open? How did it happen that a black mist——"

She didn't finish what she had started, for she suddenly remembered something, as I did. *I hadn't told her about that black mist!*

"And how," I said, "did you know of the black mist? I didn't tell you."

"My dream," she said brokenly. "Oh, what's the use? I dreamed of everything you said!"

But she couldn't say it. Her face went fiery red and snowy white by turns. Here, normally, was a sweet, fine girl who, in dreams, became something else. It was little wonder that she was terrified. And I was terrified, too, when I asked the next question.

"Tell me, Eda, how many times you've had this dream. How many other men——"

SHE was on her feet instantly.

"Never another man!" she cried. "Only the empty black room, filled with the barking of sleeve-dogs, and the search."

"The search?"

"Yes, for a man! I can't understand it. Suppose you had been less the man, less——"

"Make no mistake," I said grimly; "if you hadn't fled from me I would have *forced* an explanation. I am brutally frank."

"Then so will I be. That black mist . . . well, in this wild dream of mine I always, on the point of finding whatever it was that filled me with the dreadful, ghastly urge, turned into a black, sooty mist, and flowed out through the window! The window was always opened for me, and always closed behind me, and I never saw what, or who, opened or closed it."

"And how," I asked grimly, "did you escape from the bathroom?"

Her cry sounded like that of a mouse caught in a trap. She hadn't mentioned the bathroom.

"I became black mist," she whispered, "as soon as the door closed behind me, and mingled with the shadows in the

room when the door opened, so that my going wasn't noticed."

You can imagine how that made me feel!

"We've got to put our heads together. I'm not superstitious, or have never regarded myself as being so, but I'm beginning to wonder a great deal about all this. You must have some idea."

"Yes. When I dream that dream, I'm not myself, but Maida, seeking something. She is dead, I'm sure of it, and trying to show me something, trying to tell me something. . . ."

"Does this mean anything?" I asked hoarsely.

I pulled down the neck of my collar, showed her the two tiny dots which had bled a little, and her answer was that sharp cry again.

"Yes," she whispered, "Maida's letters, her mention of other girls who served Lun Yurka! Just before they disappeared they became lethargic, anemic, and had those dots on their necks."

"You don't," I asked, "by any chance believe in vampires?"

But I had no answer to that, for a good and sufficient reason. There was a sudden, nerve-shattering banging on the door. Eda looked at me, startled.

"The house detective," she said. "A girl mustn't have men in her room."

Well, I'd already gone to the door. The hammering, savage, terrific, kept up until I put my hand on the knob. I spun the door open. I was ready to smash the face off any house detective that walked. But —nothing doing! That hallway outside was empty of any living soul. And no human being, between the time I grabbed that door and opened it, could have got even to the nearest door and through it, after his last knocking on the panels!

It was eery, I can tell you. I started to go back, when I saw something else, something that made me squirm. Moving footprints! Yes, just that: successive indentations in the carpet, which instantly sprang back into smoothness, as though a tiny invisible dog were walking along the carpet! Nor was that all. The footprints turned at my door . . . and kept on going. The door didn't move, but I knew that the invisible dog had gone through it or under it. But what sort of dog, in God's name, could crawl under a door? Even the tiniest of sleeve-dogs couldn't have done it.

I went back to the girl.

"There's danger, all right," I said hoarsely. "Plenty of it. I'm in on it by accident; you're in it up to your neck. I think you must be getting close to a solution of the mystery of your sister's disappearance . . . and the . . . the . . . forces behind it are angry. I don't mind admitting I'm scared. If it were wolves—imagine them in hotel rooms!—I wouldn't be afraid; but those tiny dogs! They're worse than wolves."

"Yes," she whispered, "worse. Much worse, because they, because they——"

THE knocking on the door again, loud, insistent. I got the idea that whenever either of us, in talking, came close to a solution, a hint of what was behind it all, that knocking would come to drown out the words, divert our attention.

"It's in my room," I said. "Nothing will happen here. For some reason they don't cross your threshold. I can't figure it out here. I'm afraid to leave you here. Come on to my room."

She went. She was afraid, for herself, for me. I was afraid for both of us, more than I would admit, even to myself. A *crawling* something, horrible, as though slimy with the life-leaven of the ages, menaced us both. We closed the door behind us, and instantly the dog howled from the well-court. I heard, moreover,

the scurrying of many feet, there in the dark room. With a cry of abject terror Eda swung against me, clung to me, her face against my neck, her arms around me.

"I'm afraid, so horribly afraid!" she murmured.

I tried to comfort her, though my teeth chattered and my voice shook as if I had the ague.

She was panting, there against me, panting, her bosom heaving with her terror. I held her tightly, sorry for her, wishing I might give my life to be of service.

The little footfalls didn't come close. They seemed to be circling us, as though thwarted in trying to reach us by some invisible wall.

It was exactly here that I felt the girl begin to *change in my arms!* To change, to become—and she knew it, too, as I did, and both of us were stricken with terror greater than we had ever known before—the woman I had already, here, held in my arms.

"Don't," she was sobbing into my ears, "let me get away. Don't let me go out through the window. For this time, dear God, I won't ever be able to get back. Do you understand? Before I dreamed it. *This time it's real!* Hold me! Hold me!"

The myriad snarlings in the black room held a jeering note. I couldn't help the impression—born, of course, of what Eda had told me—that the jeering was that of many women.

I stood like a man turned to stone, wondering what in God's name I could do.

Eda's clothing had changed, seemed to be getting thinner. I could feel the warmth of her through her waist.

"Oh God," I prayed, "what shall I do? I *can't*, simply *can't*, let her get away!"

### 4. *The Ebon Smoke*

THERE was the feeling of conflict, of the antagonism of abysmal forces, there in the room. I was fighting, uncomprehending, against those forces. I could feel the surge and flow of a mighty will. It somehow expressed itself in understandable terms through the chuckling of the woman I held in my arms.

I stared, during the *change*, at the window which gave on the well-court, and the damned thing was slowly rising. There were no visible hands, just the slow, inexorable lifting of the window.

And the woman in my arms was changing still, into the other creature I had already held in my arms; while from her lips came two sounds: the voice of Eda, begging, beseeching me, to hold her against the forces; the chuckling of something, or someone else, from the same lips, making light of my mundane powers to hold *anything* against the unknown forces which eddied and swirled about me.

That damned window! And the howling from the well-court, and the scurrying here and there of the tiny feet in the room! I felt, strange as it sounds, that in a matter of minutes the ultimate change would come, that Eda would become the black smoke and vanish through the opening window. It couldn't, mustn't happen! I whirled with her to the closet, forced her inside, shut the door. Then, panting, terrified, not believing anything I did, but knowing I must do it, I hurried to the window and forced it shut.

It took all my strength, and I am a powerful man. Then I whirled to face the black room of many shadows, and I was panting like a spent runner.

I heard myself say, in a croaking voice, like that of a raven perhaps:

"You shan't have her, understand? She is mine! Mine, do you understand?"

The window started rising again. I could feel it against my back, and the cold breath of the night wind against me, through my clothing that perspiration had dampened. I turned, forced the window shut.

Then, savagely, forcing my will to perform the tasks, afraid of what I would see when the light came on, but holding my eyes open with all the strength of my body, I switched on the standing light first. As its light struck at the darkness like a lash, a myriad of baleful eyes glared back at me. The room was filled with snarling. It would break into howls in a moment, I knew, unless . . . unless the howling dog in the well-court bade otherwise; for somehow I knew that the dog down there was master of all the others.

Don't ask me how I knew, for I can't tell you.

But the glaring eyes, like those of cats reflecting the light, were growing dim. I dashed to the switch which turned on the dim bulbs overhead, and the shadows seemed to coalesce in the corners, outside the range of the lights.

The shadows had swallowed the eyes, the snarling things from Hell . . . or else the snarling things and the shadows were one.

Now I stooped, broke off a chair-leg, smashed one end to a broken mass against the wall, and jammed it in between the two sections of window, so that no power could lift that window without breaking something. And something—*something,* I say!—immediately tried. The howling down in the sooty dark was ghastly. The dog came back on the sill, flinging himself against the window-pane; but for all his vociferous scolding, which rasped my nerves and shriveled my soul, his body *was* small, and he couldn't break through the glass.

I stared at the dogs. One, I would have sworn, should have been dead, for I had twisted his head off, flung him under the bed. Yet now I could see the spot where I had flung him, and that it was empty. I got the ghastly idea:

*"You can't slay the dead, or the undead!"*

And as though my own words had been a spell, I became rigid, moveless, and the dogs poured over me as I sat, and over Eda Noonan.

It was right here that I heard a soft chuckle, near the window. I turned my head, which felt heavy and sick, and saw the dog from the well-court. He was just hopping from the window-sill into the room . . . and his eyes which looked into mine were the mocking eyes of the bell-hop-clerk! No mistaking them, nor that he was Lun Yurka, the Eurasian!

If only, now, I could get to that window! But my body was inert, lifeless.

### 5. *Strange Transfer*

MY MIND seemed to be working with lightning-speed, even though my body would not work at all. My eyes swerved from Eda to the sleeve-dog, with the eyes of the Eurasian, there on the floor. The sleeve-dog from the well-court was laughing, and his eyes were as mocking as ever.

There, said my brain, is Lun Yurka, the Eurasian, a vampire out of the high passes of the Far East, ages old. Sleeve-dogs have been the pets of oriental rulers for ages. It is little wonder then. . . .

And how did the animal rise from the court?

That was easy, too, when one accepted the premise that Lun Yurka, the undead, and his women—now the dogs which fought over blood from my throat—were vampires. Maybe the howling in the court had been nothing but that—howling. The vampire could have flown to the window-

sill as a bat, and there taken the shape of the sleeve-dog.

Foolish, absurd, fantastic, insane! Yes, I used all those words to describe it, though I could find no words to describe my horror and fear. The brutes had imbibed before my eyes of the blood of Eda Noonan; by the ancient hellish creed of the vampires she, when she died, would become as one of them. Not only that, but her own sister, here among the sleeve-dogs, must have been among her attackers!

It made my flesh crawl, even as I forced my lips to call a name:

"Maida! Maida!"

And one of the dogs on my chest, which now was dyed with my own blood, broke from the mass, looked all around—and would have howled dolefully, nose pointed at the ceiling of the room, had not the dog from the well-court, Lun Yurka the Eurasian, barked softly, a command, I knew, for silence.

Horror gripped me. There seemed no escape. Then my eyes were on Eda, there on the bed, and again a change was taking place in her. The dog from the well-court had hopped to the bed, was squatting on her chest, red tongue lolling out in hellish laughter. Baleful eyes fixed on the sleeping girl.

Eda's eyes slowly opened. Out of her mouth came a strange, unearthly voice:

*"I hear, Lun Yurka, and I obey!"*

Even the last word, "obey," came from her lips with difficulty, for the change was almost too swift to note. But one second there was Eda Noonan, promising abject obedience to Lun Yurka. And next moment——

A sleeve-dog, with the eyes of Eda Noonan, jumped blithely out from under the covers, advanced to rub noses with the dog from the well-court—*and Eda Noonan was nowhere to be seen!*

I think the horror of that gripped me more than anything else could have done. I figured it out this way: the dogs had drunk of Eda's blood until she had died, and her death had made her one with them. In spite of everything I had been able to do, I hadn't been able to keep her on this side of whatever horrible veil separated normal people from the ghastly people who were like Lun Yurka.

And it was all the fault of Lun Yurka.

*And I would be like him, too, if I did not do something!* But what could I do? Old legends said you cut off their heads, drove stakes through their hearts. But I had nothing with which to sever the brute's head, nor any stake to drive.

But I'd find a way. With all my will I commanded my body to act. I know now, looking back, that I did only the will of Lun Yurka, who, Eda Noonan said, had been slain before I had even come to this hotel.

I SWOOPED from the chair. The dogs spilled onto the floor, where they instantly attacked my legs. Their sharp teeth struck at me, but I scarcely felt them. I scooped up the sleeve-dog I knew was Eda Noonan, thrust her into my clothing, where she lay warm against my flesh.

My other hand clutched and held the sleeve-dog from the well-court.

What followed then was proof, I think, that I was utterly mad, or that I was not in possession of my own faculties—literally.

I held the dog in my hands, tightly clutched. Its eyes dared me to do anything. Its lolling red tongue laughed at me with the mocking laughter of that bellhop.

I heard myself saying, in a raucous croak:

"I know you, Lun Yurka, and you are finished. Never again will you create new horrors to loose upon the world. You are going, now, to die."

He howled in glee, that blasted thing, that horrid *little thing,* out of some oriental Purgatory.

He could, then and there, I am sure, have become the bellhop in his full stature. But he did not, which proves, I think, that he didn't wish to; that he wished to happen—what did happen.

How should I destroy him? I had twisted the head off one sleeve-dog, and it hadn't died.

But there must be a way. The drinking, the ghastly blood-feast of the sleeve-dogs, actuated me; or maybe, deep down inside me, kin to Lun Yurka because his hell-dogs had tainted my blood with their taint, his will forced me to obey his commands.

But I went mad, with a horrible lust to destroy, and I had nothing but my hands and my teeth.

And when my hands had finished, ripping, tearing, while my mouth snarled, the sleeve-dog from the well-court was gone, and my mouth was smeared with blood. . . .

How could Lun Yurka return, then, when I had so completely destroyed him? Certainly the oldsters who had kept the legend alive—the legend of decapitation and the stake through the heart for vampires—had never thought of this!

Then I took the little sleeve-dog from my garments, dropped her on the bed, and whispered hoarsely:

"I've found the way, Eda, and we shall never again be parted; at least not by Lun Yurka's horrors. Never ask me how I did it, for you would turn from me in mad hysteria."

I dropped her on the bed, said:

"Lie quietly and become Eda Noonan again."

The fact that I gave such a command, spontaneously, and that she obeyed so implicitly, should have told me the truth, but it did not. It simply seemed the natural thing to do; so I did it.

And there, while I sat back with a sigh, Eda Noonan reposed on the bed, smiling a secretive smile at me.

"You are a very smart man, Adam," she said . . . and her voice was so very strange, her lips so very, very red.

I looked, and the window was open. I lighted the electrics and the dogs were gone, shadows were suddenly in the corner; then black mist was going out through the window, and I was alone with Eda Noonan.

It no longer seemed to matter to her about Maida. Why should it have mattered? She had found Maida, and whatever could have been done, I . . . well, I had done it, erasing all vestiges of Lun Yurka.

I FELT very strange when morning came and I went down to the desk to check out. Eda had gone. She was to meet me on the corner, in the heart of Times Square. I was eager to meet her there. At any other hotel in town we could be together.

"I'll have my bill, please," I told the clerk.

He started, looked at me. It irritated me.

"What the devil's wrong, fellow?" I snarled.

"Your voice, Mister Clerc," he said. "It reminded me of something!"

"Of what, may I ask?"

"We had a guest here, before your present visit. He had the room next to yours. It was very unfortunate . . . his name was Lun Yurka, and your voice, just now, was his voice!"

Abysmal fear swept over me, fear greater than any I had ever known. I was, I was sure, Adam Clerc. I looked at myself in a mirror, going out of the hotel,

and I *was* Adam Clerc, though my own eyes mocked me from the mirror.

And when, later, Eda and I registered at another hotel, it was with the greatest difficulty that I did the usual, signing my name, Adam Clerc, with my customary flourish. I felt as though I were forging a name, that the name I should have signed was: Lun Yurka!

And on the way to the hotel I had stared at the necks of all beautiful women on the street, and it had been a vast effort of will, on my part, that had kept me from attacking them, ripping at their white necks with savage teeth.

Eda, I noted, stared with a hunger akin to mine, at the necks of men we met—the young, handsome, *blooded* men!

And with us, as we went, trotted the sleeve-dogs. Eda saw them, I saw them; but none in this hotel, where dogs were positively forbidden, paid them the slightest heed, or sought to sidestep them as they walked. . . .

Yes, I am Lun Yurka. Maida and Eda are together again—as all of us will be down the centuries to come, until someone thinks of decapitation and the stake through the heart.

I think, after finding a body that suited me, that of Adam Clerc, I was very clever in obtaining possession of it, for now Adam has his Eda, Eda has her Maida, but I . . . I . . . Lun Yurka, old almost as the Himalayas, am master of them all.

There is a touch of humor in it, too—that, though Adam Clerc will never die, his terror can never end. Even Lun Yurka must have his touch of amusement to make bloody eternity endurable. . . .

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# Ennui

By CLARK ASHTON SMITH

Thou art immured in some sad garden sown with dust
Of fruit of Sodom that bedims the summer ground,
And burdenously bows the lilies many-crowned,
Or fills the pale and ebon mouths of sleepy lust
The poppies raise. . . . And, falling there imponderously,
Dull ashes emptied from the urns of all the dead
Have stilled the fountain and have sealed the fountain-head,
And pall-wise draped the pine and flowering myrtle-tree. . . .

Thou art becalmed upon that slothful ancient main
Where Styx and Lethe fall; where skies of stagnant gray
With the gray stagnant waters meet and merge as one:
How tardily thy torpid heart remembers pain,
And love itself, as aureate islands far away,
On seas refulgent with the incredible red sun.

# The Ruler of Fate

By JACK WILLIAMSON

*A thrilling, fascinating, thought-provoking tale of romance and a weird creature that rules our Earth from a cavern of horror on the Moon*

*The Story Thus Far*

INJURED in a deadly accident, Kane Montel is ready to abandon his attempts to reach the moon, in his impulse flyer. Bad luck—fate—has defeated him. But then his friend, the statesman Martin Grenfell, tells him that he must carry on, to avert war.

"Tangled circumstance," he says, "fate, has created this world-wide fever of war. It is needless. And you can kill it, Montel, if you reach the moon — with the sense of common human victory. If you fail, civilization is doomed."

And Kane takes off, hastily, for a last grim attempt. Lovely Shiela Hall, his secretary, is with him. And luck has changed miraculously. Without mishap, the two reach the moon, near the mysterious rays of the great crater, Tycho.

Investigating the rays, they are captured by unexpected human dwellers on the moon. Amazingly, Vethlo, the gaunt, young-old leader, speaks English. He seems to know all about them.

"My master is Aru, the Lord of Destiny," Vethlo tells them. "Through the machine, he rules your world. He caused you to reach the moon, because he has a purpose for you—for one of you."

His dark eyes leer at Shiela, dreadful with hidden speculation.

He demonstrates the colossal machine of destiny. Through the terrific force of the rays of Tycho, which curve out to hold the earth in their web of impalpable power, the machine controls the world like a toy.

The story continues:

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*5. "The World Is a Toy!"*

"THE subsiding magmas of the cooling moon left many such cavernous spaces as these under Tycho," Vethlo informed them.

They had descended the ladder beneath the air-lock of the spherical ship. Their apprehensions momentarily overcome by amazed wonder, Kane and Shiela were staring about, breathlessly.

The thin, cool air about them was filled with a pale, violet light, as if it were itself slightly luminous. The sourceless radiance shone upon the dark, looming, cragged walls, upon the oppressive roof, of a cave incredibly vast. Vastness brought no relief from the sense of crushing, overwhelming mass above. Farther spaces extended away into purple gloom.

The cavern floor was covered with thickets and fields of curious vegetation. It was fungus-like, or fern-like, or totally strange. The predominating color, beneath the sourceless, enigmatic light, was a weird blood-red.

Looking into the darkness of a far, unlit space, Kane saw a distant structure towering luminously. It was a cluster of thin, lofty cones, fluted spirally. They shone with deepest blue, and each high point was tipped with purple flame.

The eldritch mystery of it, burning



This story begins in WEIRD TALES for April

"She was human, certainly, but not homo sapiens."

against the violet dark, held him with a nameless fascination. Beside him Shiela shivered, clutching at his arm.

"That is the dwelling of Aru, the master of destiny," Vethlo informed them. "I shall take you before him, there. But first you must witness the machine."

He led them a little aside, so that they could view a thing that had been hidden by the bulk of the ship. Kane gasped with amazement, and Shiela cried out.

It was a machine they saw, but a machine incredibly huge. Its supporting girders towered up, against the rough black walls of the volcanic cavern, a full mile. Carried amid the girders was a maze of intricate mechanism from whose complexity the mind recoiled in dismay.

Set above them was a crown of tremendous, curved tubes, which burned with lurid, flickering hues of scarlet and green.

Flung out from those tubes was a net of rays. Flaming swords of white, unchanging opalescence, they stabbed into the black cavern roof.

"The rays, Monty!" whispered Shiela. "The rays of Tycho! They come from here, up through the surface of the moon."

"Exactly," said Vethlo, gravely.

"But the extreme penetration," murmured Kane. "I don't understand——"

"Those rays," the thin man informed them, "represent an order of energy which my master has not allowed your scientists to investigate. They curve out beyond the moon, invisibly. Earth is caught in their impalpable net.

"Their sensitive fields serve as detectors for the harmonic analyzers, here. No act of any being on the planet, no word spoken, escapes those delicate fields. The effect of every falling leaf, every insect sound, is carried here to the moon, recorded."

His thin, black-clad arm gestured at the crown of white rays.

"They serve also as a means of control. At any point upon the planet, the rays are so weak that men have never detected them; yet their influence is everywhere. The forces they exert are always slight: a tiny electric charge, imparted to a raindrop; a few electrons liberated, in some neurone cell in a man's brain.

"But that slight force has been calculated by mechanisms a million times more complex than the human brain. And it shapes results as a pebble starts an avalanche.

"The machine analyzes all the elements of every situation, which are picked up by the fields of the ray. Then, again through the ray, those few tiny factors are changed, which must be changed to make the resulting events obey my master's will."

Shiela was still clutching Kane's big arm, trembling.

"The machine knows — everything?" she whispered. "It has all power? Like a mechanical god?"

She shuddered.

"Come," resumed the weary, sorrowful tones of the lean man in black. "Words are but words. You will not feel my master's power until you have seen."

He led the way toward the tremendous, looming mountain of the machine. Kane and Shiela followed, silent with the pressure of numbing dread.

At last, across the strangeness of the scarlet garden, they came into the machine's glistening bulk. Vethlo guided them along a narrow, railed walk that pierced its heart. In mute wonder, Kane gazed about him at the mass of equipment carried upon the cross-members between the soaring girders.

The individual units looked delicate and precisely made as the parts of a fine watch. Tiny spheres of white crystal, rolling slowly upon curving crystal surfaces. Silently spinning disks, sliding levers, rotating cams, styles tracing grooves in moving plates. Flashing lights, interlacing multicolored rays, curved mirrors, lenses. The only sound, from all of it, was a faint rustling whisper. It was, Kane thought, the perfect mechanism.

Into an open, circular space they came, walled with the machine's intricacy. Looking upward, Kane saw the red-and-green flicker of the crown of tubes, visible at the top of a great shaft.

The space was paved with hard white metal. At its center was a ring-shaped table, ten yards in diameter. The surface of its curving, yard-wide top was set with a maze of gleaming instruments: levers, keys, buttons, dials, knobs. It was the control board, Kane immediately guessed.

"Here is the earth," said the solemn voice of Vethlo.

His thin fingers played skilfully over keys and dials.

A pallid arm of silver radiance fell down the mile-deep shaft, from the crown of flaming, colossal tubes.

KANE drew in his breath sharply, staggered with surprize.

Out of the ray was born an image of the earth. No more than twenty feet in diameter, it hung within and above the ring-shaped table. Only an image, it must be, he knew, created at the focal point of the ray by some unguessed miracle of optical science. But its impression of solid, material reality was overwhelming. Every detail of continental outline, of mountain and river and forest and polar cap, stood out sharply, down to the limit of his vision.

"Why," Shiela gasped, "why, it's like a toy world!"

"It is," said the thin man. "The toy of the machine."

He moved a little around the table, to a white screen, four feet high, framed in intricate mechanism. Its surface had an odd, granular luster, as if composed of millions of microscopic, luminous cells.

"Here," said Vethlo, "we may have a closer view."

His hands ran over the dials and keys below the screen. Behind it, the image of the earth turned a little. It stopped with western America toward them; with the faint gray blur of San Francisco, Kane saw, at the apex of a metal cone behind the screen.

Upon the screen, sharply clear, faithful to every vivid hue of sea and land and sky, appeared the Golden Gate and the city's familiar bay-front façade.

"It—it's real," whispered Shiela. "I was born there."

"So you were," said Vethlo.

Again he touched the controls.

The city shifted, raced toward them upon the screen.

And Kane was looking, suddenly, upon a weathered, shabby two-story house on the slope of a hill, behind a wide yard red with autumn leaves.

"Our house!" breathed Shiela, in awed recognition. "Where I was born——"

Her words halted, as the door opened and a slender girl in red-and-white street pajamas came running down the leaf-strewn walk.

"Shiela!" gasped Kane.

It was indeed the girl beside him, as she must have been at fifteen.

A heavy, smiling man in business gray, finishing a black pipe, strode briskly into the picture.

"Dad!" whispered Shiela, voiceless.

"Daddy!" her own voice echoed from behind the screen, from the lips of that Shiela of the years ago. "You're late. Do hurry and wash for dinner. I helped Mildred fix it, today. And there's sherbet. Do hurry——"

The clear voice faded, as Kane felt a shudder of uncanny wonder mount along his spine.

"Poor Dad," whispered Shiela, her voice husky with remembered grief. "That was just before he took sick——"

The scene shifted again. They were looking through an open window, into the shabby house. They saw the heavy man, now lying in bed, flushed, haggard, smiling up at the slender, troubled girl, who stood at the bedside with a tray. The girl was Shiela again. Her voice came from the screen, ringing with forced cheer:

"Of course you are, Dad. Buck up. You're going to be as well as anybody."

The screen went white again, and the weary voice of Vethlo said:

"But my master willed otherwise."

He looked at Shiela. She was biting her full lip to keep back a sob.

"Perhaps," he said, "you two recall the day when my master first brought you together."

The image of the earth turned again, behind the screen. And on the screen abruptly appeared the shops and the testing-field of the Montel Foundation, at Maple Hill. A battered taxi stopped before the buildings. Shiela got out. She was four years older now, taller, trim in a business suit. She paid the driver from a thin purse. Anxiously, diffidently, she walked to the door.

Kane himself opened it for her, a powerful, black-haired giant in white overalls. His gray eyes lit at sight of her. A quick smile broke on his lean face.

"I'm looking for Mr. Montel," said Shiela's doubtful voice from the screen. "I'm the secretary he asked the agency to send."

Kane repressed an inward shudder of uncanny wonder as his own voice answered cheerfully:

"Good. I'm Montel. Come in." He made way for her. "Handle technical dictation? Getting off some factory specifications today." He looked at her weary face, and smiled again. "Had lunch, kid? Sandwiches back here, and a jug of coffee."

The picture faded, and Kane whispered, wonderingly:

"Three years ago."

"Time is nothing to the machine," said Vethlo, "save that it has already fixed the past, while the future is fluid, still, to be molded by the machine to my master's will."

His thin fingers ran over the controls. The bright globe of the earth spun behind the screen.

"I must show you now," he said, "how events are shaped."

San Francisco was on the screen again: Market Street. Traffic was stopped by a cordon of police. The pavement was jammed with a waiting throng. A white sea of faces looked up toward an empty balcony.

Then a man was on the balcony, speaking eloquently.

"Senator Grenfell," whispered Kane.

Martin Grenfell it was, slender, erect, immaculately clad. He was gesturing as he talked. The movements of his mobile, small-featured face, of his whole body, as always, emphasized his words.

"The madness of war has seized upon us," the soft magic of his voice came from the screen. "I appeal to you, my fellow human beings, to fight it like a fever. Keep your sanity. Keep your feet on the ground, your eyes on the facts.

"The war can bring no good—not to any man living. The era of war for profit has passed. Every one of you must know the horror locked up in the new weapons that other nations have ready, and that America has ready. You must have read of the new atomic bombs, that can turn the green wealth of your fertile state into lifeless, burning dust.

"The war will kill civilization—perhaps kill the human race."

A desperate, terrible urgency had come into Martin Grenfell's ringing tones. Kane could read the fatigue upon his face, the bitter despair hidden under his words. He realized that the little statesman was throwing his last resource of effort into a grim, hopeless battle.

"And there is no need of war," the urgent voice went on. "This fever of war is simply mad emotion, born of blind circumstance. We must see the truth. We must recognize the war psychosis for the needless horror that it is. We must break the web of emotion, escape that psychosis.

"I had hoped that Kane Montel and Shiela Hall might help us, when they

flew out to the moon, a month ago. Surely the pride of such a magnificent achievement would save the human race. Mankind could not conquer space, and then fail to conquer its own blind madness.

"But the two did not return. The *Spirit of Man* must have been lost in——"

As Martin Grenfell spoke from the screen, Vethlo had drawn a small instrument from a socket below. It was a small needle, set in an ebon handle. Its sharp point glowed with a sinister scarlet incandescence.

With an odd, sorrowful reluctance of manner, with pitying dread like a shadow on his long, thin face, he pressed the dark handle into Shiela's hand.

"Touch the man Grenfell," his low voice commanded. "It is my master's will."

Shiela shrank back unwillingly, trembling.

Grasping her fingers in his thin, powerful hand, Vethlo pushed them forward, so that the ominous red point of the needle touched the breast of Martin Grenfell, upon the screen.

"The will of Aru," said Vethlo, in tones that rang with dread.

From behind the screen came the sharp, repeated crack of a pistol. The urgent, appealing voice of Martin Grenfell was abruptly cut off. His arms were flung suddenly wide, in a gesture of convulsive agony. Then his small body staggered forward, collapsed. It hung limp and lifeless over the balcony rail.

Morbid excitement stirred the horror-stricken crowd below. Sudden confusion surrounded a man struggling wildly toward the balcony, waving a revolver.

"I killed him!" he was screaming, in tones of insane emotion. "Damned pacifist! Grenfell was trying to bind America hand and foot, and betray us to the enemy. I killed him. I'm glad of it!"

And then, as the scene faded, a policeman was taking away the gun.

"One illustration of the power of the machine of destiny," remarked Vethlo. His voice held a dull, weary regret. "Among other decisive factors in the shaping of this event, the rays influenced an unbalanced brain, by the release of a few free electrons in one neurone fiber."

He turned slowly to Kane, who was still dazed and speechless with horror.

"My master, Aru," he said, in the same tone of lifeless, hopeless regret, "wills that you should participate in another illustration."

HE TOUCHED the intricate controls again. San Francisco retreated, until the Golden Gate was once more visible and the green-clad hills that framed the city and the bay.

One thin finger indicated a red button, upon the curving table, which gleamed like a malefic eye.

"Touch that," he said. "Aru commands it."

Voiceless with numbing, helpless dread, Kane mutely refused.

"Then allow me," said Vethlo, bleakly. "I do it upon your behalf, at the will of my master."

He depressed the crimson button.

Above the white city, Kane's eye caught the gray, fleeting motes of airplanes, wheeling high above the futile bursts of defending guns. He saw the little spurts of orange flame, the fountains of white dust, where bombs fell. He saw white buildings collapse and burn; he watched gray destruction consume the green upon the hills.

Dust lay where the heart of San Francisco had been. In patches of leprous ray, it shone oddly with prismatic glints too faint for the eye to analyze. It spread. Trees and buildings crumbled into it, consumed. And the last green, the last

hint of life, was presently gone from the barren gray slopes above the empty bay.

Gray dust swirled and shimmered, down to the water's edge.

"That is six months in the future," said Vethlo. "The war, of course, follows the death of Martin Grenfell. The special factors eventuating in the destruction of San Francisco involve an electronic disturbance in the brain of an American general, and a consequent forgotten command which results in the annihilation of the Pacific fleet."

Kane and Shiela did not speak. Clutching hands, they looked each at the other, seeking mutual strength to sustain them against overwhelming horror.

"Now," the thin man asked them, "are you convinced of the power of Aru, through his machine?"

Numbed, shuddering, the two mutely shook their heads. A deep inner conviction told Kane that the horror of that last scene had been no trickery, no illusion, but dreadful truth. The omnipotence of the machine overwhelmed him.

"Then we shall go to the dwelling of Aru," Vethlo announced. "From his own lips you will learn the fate he has designed for you."

His dark eyes rested upon Shiela's white beauty, somberly dreadful with a leering, half-hidden speculation.

### 6. *The Lord of Destiny*

"DESCEND," said Vethlo.

He paused above a railed opening at the edge of the circular floor.

With Shiela beside him, Kane went down a short flight of steps, into a small, box-like chamber of white metal. Following, Vethlo motioned them to seats. He touched a knob on the wall. Kane swayed to sudden motion.

"Sort of subway," he commented.

The motion stopped. Vethlo rose.

"Follow me," he said. "Above is my master's dwelling."

At the top of the steps, Kane and Shiela came into a singular room. It took up, evidently, all the interior of one of the blue cones which they had seen burning against the dark remoteness of the cavern. Its curving, overhanging walls shone with a deep and eldritch blue.

The circular floor was vast and largely vacant.

In its center was a ring-shaped table, studded with intricate mechanism — the duplicate of the one they had just left. Within and about it, sharply focused, hung another image of the earth, a miniature planet, vividly real.

"A second control-board," murmured Kane.

Vethlo deliberately led them across the wide floor, and around the circular table, and so brought them face to face with the huge room's one occupant.

"Master," said Vethlo, in a humble, half-fearful tone, "these are the two adventurers from Earth."

Before the control-board, the man was reclining upon a long, luxurious divan. He was inordinately fat, and the white, bulging rolls of his flesh were swathed in sheer fabric of fine-spun silver, woven with strands of scarlet. His hair was straw-colored, and fine as a woman's, and braided in an elaborate jeweled coiffure which capped the huge sphere of his head.

His features were all but lost between the pink-white masses of his cheeks. His small, half-concealed eyes were a light, hard blue-green. They twinkled maliciously. They were cunning, cruel eyes. And they were veiled with a baffling inhumanity that made them strange, unreadable, as the eyes of some animal.

He looked at Kane and Shiela, indolently, without moving to rise. He began to laugh. The heavy white masses of his

flesh, beneath the silver-and-scarlet gown, quivered like jelly. His tiny, red-lipped mouth opened to a perfect round, and his gasping breath hissed through it.

The uncontrolled laughter went on, until Kane's ragged nerves drove him forward.

"Aru?" he questioned grimly. "Call yourself Lord of Destiny?"

The laughter subsided a little. The bright, hard eyes were uncovered again. They stared at Kane. Then they leered across at Shiela, with a brutish obscenity in them that rocked Kane forward on his toes. His heart drummed in his big chest, and a white wrath urged him to sink his fingers in this soft flesh and rend the lecherous life from it.

"Recall yourself," spoke the low, weary voice of Vethlo.

Glancing at him, Kane saw that he gripped a small sphere, from which a thin golden needle projected menacingly.

Still quivering with rage, Kane restrained his hot lust to slay.

Harshly, he demanded of the inert man: "What do you want of us?"

Aru spoke. His voice was soft as his body, high-pitched as a woman's, cruelly caressing.

"Of you," he said, "only the joy of crushing you, with amusing agony. Of the woman—more."

The glittering, greenish eyes dwelt upon Shiela, indolently, insolently, burning with a singular, passionless avidity. The girl shrank against Kane's arm, trembling. The rose of shame flooded her fair skin, and then drained away until she was ghostly pale. And her eyes were deep with the purple of terror.

Kane felt his muscles tensing. His gray eyes measured the short distance to the divan, flashed a glance at Vethlo. One instant, to sink his hands into the white, shuddering thickness of Aru's throat——

"Watch!" the soft voice called to Vethlo.

The thin man's weary voice spoke to Kane:

"My weapon is less insignificant than its size might lead you to suppose. Its discharge of free electrons could burn you to a cinder, instantly."

"You should be warned of another thing, also," said Aru. His fluid tones were limpidly sweet. "My life is guarded by the machine, so that fate will let no man strike at me. And the machine is set, also, so that if any man should strike from an unguarded sector, and harm me —his own doom will immediately find him. Thus, Kane Montel, my life is doubly guarded. And my slayer shall instantly die."

"Might be worth it," muttered Kane.

"Allow your weapon to convince this man," cooed the soft tones, to Vethlo.

VETHLO's thin hand grew tight on the black sphere. The golden needle, pointed at Kane, glowed. It spurted purple flame. Kane reeled to an avalanche of burning agony. He spun to the floor, paralyzed by the torturing shock, his big muscles knotted with uncontrollable convulsions.

"Good," gasped Aru, through his laughter.

Kane staggered back to his feet, beside Shiela, his outraged body quivering. His skin smarted cruelly where the force of the weapon had struck; he caught a little odor of burnt flesh.

"I could have used a thousand times more power," Vethlo informed him.

"Well," muttered Kane, harshly. He looked grimly at Aru, who was trembling and gasping with amusement. "What do you want?"

Aru controlled his heaving laughter.

"You are convinced now," he asked

softly, "of my power? Of your helplessness?"

Kane bit his lip, grimly silent.

"Then," Aru's voice caressed him, "I shall tell you of my purpose for the woman. I shall tell you why your flight to the moon was impossible until Shiela Hall was upon the flyer, and then easy."

Kane and Shiela stood together, staring at him. They were mute, fascinated by the menace of his power and the pitiless beauty of his liquid voice.

"The earth," he said, "has been a game. Humanity has been a jest of mine. It has amused me long. But one tires of a game. The best jest wearies, if the point is too long delayed. And therefore the jest must reach its end.

"The war whose beginnings my servant has showed you will wreck the toy you call civilization, within this year. The atomic bombs—the gift of your father to the world, Kane Montel—will spread deserts of eternal flame.

"For a whole generation, a few men will linger on, always fleeing before the spreading terror of the dust. Then, when the last man is overtaken by the desert of atomic flame, in his stone hut by the polar sea—the jest will be done.

"The jest on Earth," he said caressingly.

The pale greenish eyes rested upon Shiela again with a keenness that stripped the garments from her white body. The pink rolls of flesh hid his eyes, and his gross body quivered to gasping laughter.

Kane swung upon him, driven by resistless anger. But Vethlo was waiting, wearily alert, a yard behind Kane. The agonizing prod of his electron-ray stopped him again with its merciless paralysis.

Aru's laughter ceased, and he said:

"Yet one would grow weary indeed, with no jest at all, and no game to play. And therefore I have devised a new game, more clever than the old. This woman, Shiela Hall, is to play against me. Her beauty is to be the prize. Her hatred of me, her remembered love of you, Kane Montel, will give spirit to her play.

"It will be no brief game. It may last as long as the game of humanity has lasted. For I can give her life as long as mine—however unwilling she may be to accept it. Her beauty I can make eternal—a greater prize to play for.

"Nor will it be a simple game. I have devised intricacies—intricacies as delightful as the death of mankind by your father's gift, Kane Montel, which he believed to be life and happiness.

"But you, Kane Montel, have no further part in the game—save as you may live in the memory of Shiela Hall and make her playing keener. Therefore, if you will now bid her farewell, my servant will conduct you back to your doomed flyer — its name is part of the jest — so that you may attempt to return to the earth."

"Yes?" rapped Kane, staring at him with a curious fixity. "Yes?"

A dull blankness filled his mind. He was beyond emotion. Fear and horror and despair had been thrust from him by the grim necessity of mental self-preservation. His gray eyes gazed at Aru, with no light in them, and his numbed brain was hardly aware of the thing he was doing.

Vethlo was standing a yard behind him, with the deadly golden needle steady, covering him.

Kane's foot came up abruptly, kicked straight back at Vethlo's knee.

He heard the thin man's mute little cry of unendurable pain. He heard the dropped weapon clatter on the floor, even as he lunged forward toward the inert grossness of the monster on the divan.

The exultation of unexpected victory,

for one sweet instant, rang loud in his brain. His fingers were already tensing, to sink into the fat throat of Aru.

But the puffy white hand moved a little on the divan's ornamental arm. And a sheet of crackling, greenish flame burst upward from a suddenly glowing ring in the floor, surrounding Aru with a shining wall.

Kane's headlong lunge carried him into that wall—and into an inferno of pain. His body was racked and twisted with the agony of a strange force that seemed to sear every nerve-fiber in his body. His joints cracked. Every muscle jerked into a tortured knot. The breath drove out of him. Fiery darkness blinded him.

He knew, in that instant of ultimate pain, that he had fallen across the abruptly glowing ring, inlaid in the floor, surrounding Aru. Agony completely paralyzed him. He was helpless to move out of the wall of greenish, consuming flame which rose from it.

He knew that the flame was killing him. For one long instant he struggled vainly to roll out of it. Then darkness cut short his agony.

When he came slowly back to awareness, he knew first that the strange fire no longer burned him. And he sensed a curious, silent tension that now filled the huge room.

As his mind rose slowly out of the abyss of pain and oblivion, the tones of a singular voice kept ringing in his memory. It was a woman's voice, but strong and deep. It rang with a melodious, golden power.

Out of the darkness it had come, urgently commanding:

"Stop the flame. He must not die."

That unfamiliar voice was like a golden thread that drew him back to life—and to the silent conflict that filled the room.

### 7. *She—from the Shadow*

WEARILY, Kane threw himself back upon his haunches and lurched heavily to his feet. He stood swaying, fighting away dizziness and nausea and pain. His skin was blistered, smarting, where the wall of flame had seared it. Every muscle in his big body ached from forced, agonizing contraction. And the fog of blindness still pressed in upon him.

"Stop the flame. He must live."

That strange voice of living, vibrant gold rang still in his mind. He peered about, drunkenly, trying to see who had spoken.

Dimly, he knew that Shiela was close beside him. He could feel her cool, tender hands against his tortured body, her quick strength aiding his lurching efforts to stand.

"Monty?" her low voice was in his ears, anxious, appealing. "Monty? How are you, Monty?"

"All—all right," he gasped hoarsely, through the leaden mists of pain. "Who—spoke?"

He was trying to see. Dimly, he could see the blue depths of the curving walls. He made out the brilliant disk, that was the image of the earth, floating above the ring-shaped table. Then his clearing eyes saw Aru, inert on his couch, not laughing now. And he saw the dark, thin form of Vethlo, sprawled moaning on the floor, nursing the knee that Kane had kicked.

His eyes found the white beauty of Shiela's anxious face, close to him. He smiled at her, feebly.

"Who was it spoke, kid?" he gasped again. "Who stopped—the flame?"

"There, Monty!" The girl spoke in a queer, awed voice. She pointed. "There—I don't know who—what——"

Kane looked where she pointed. He saw a thing so strange that at first he

thought it an aberration of his disturbed vision. For a long moment he stared, until the sharpening detail convinced him that he looked upon reality.

Suspended just above the floor was a shape like a tremendous jewel. It was a faceted mass of purple shadow, three yards through. And within that bulk of shining shadow stood — or floated — a woman.

Or was she woman?

Kane shaded his uncertain, aching eyes, peering at her. Surely no woman ever looked so strange as she. Just as surely, none ever looked more womanly.

She was tall and slender and straight. Her skin was golden, not yellow merely, but truly golden, and textured with the glowing, unwrinkled softness of eternal youth. Her hair was the pure white of silver, and abundant, and very long. Bound in scarlet, it hung behind her back.

Her eyes were large, long, somewhat oblique; they were black with the darkness of midnight.

She wore a long, sheer gown of lustrous black, touched here and there with crimson. Molded to the full rounds of her breasts, to the perfect columns of her thighs, it hid no curving beauty of her.

Kane searched her regular, classic features, pointed, elfin face, small, red-lipped mouth, straight nose, with delicately flaring nostrils. Something in them hinted of the immemorial past.

Yet nowhere could he find the key to her strangeness. No, the oddness of golden skin, snowy hair, archaic face—they could not account for it. There was some deeper, more elemental strangeness. Deeper—yet not so deep as her womanhood.

If she had belonged to some elder human species, he thought; human, certainly, but not *homo sapiens*. . . .

Then she moved. She touched a hot purple orb that clung to one long finger of her left hand—a singular ring. And the purple shadow fell away from her. It dissolved, vanished, like the ghost of a purple jewel.

The woman sank lightly to the floor. She swept toward him, with a walk that was pure, delicious rhythm.

"Kane Montel," resounded the magic chime of that deeply golden voice that had saved him from the flame, "I cannot heal you now, but my hands can soothe your pain."

And her hands touched him. They were the color of pale gold, and slender; the fingers very long. They brushed his cheeks. They moved across his shoulders, down his arms, down his sides to his knees. They left a curious tingling coolness that blotted out the agony of his seared skin.

Kane's eyes fastened upon her ring. The white band was very thick, with six little knurled studs projecting from it. The huge set was purple, with its own inner fire. Its facets, he saw, were like the facets of the shadow-jewel that had enveloped her.

Was the ring a machine? Had it brought her here?

RELAXATION crept over him in the wake of her easing hands. The wonder left him. He swayed backward a little, his eyes closing for an instant.

"Thanks," he murmured.

"Athonee!"

The name leapt from Aru's lips with the venomous suddenness of a striking snake.

"Athonee! Leave that carrion. It has played its part in my game. I have done with it. But I shall destroy it as I please, without aid from you, my mother."

His small eyes stared at her, insolently. A ruddy color was mounting into his gross flesh. Aru had been frightened, Kane realized, by the sudden apparition

of this strange woman — by whatever means had brought her within that ghostly jewel-shape.

His blustering courage was just returning.

"By what right, my darling Athonee," his liquidly soft voice inquired, poisonously caressing, "do you return from the lower caves? Do you forget that I sent you there for ever? Do you forget that I am the master, that the power and the knowledge of the machine are mine?"

"I do not forget," replied the deep, golden voice, "that I created the machine long before that ill day when my reckless passion brought you into being, my son. I do not forget that I have one secret that gives me power over you, and that it is a secret which the machine can never tell you."

Aru heaved uneasily upon his divan.

"The machine," he blustered, "gives me all knowledge."

"Not all," said Athonee. "For it warned me of this day. And it gave me the secret that is today my strength. And, foreseeing this day, I changed the machine. One sector of knowledge is closed to it, so that it can never reveal to you the secret, nor destroy my secret strength.

"There is one factor in your life, my son, a ruling factor, that the machine can not read to you — and can not change. That key to your doom I have kept to myself, against this fatal day. The cup of your life is in my hands, to spill as I choose."

Aru was staring at her. His skin had gone a sickly yellow-white. His pale greenish eyes were wide, protruding. His gross mass was trembling again, not with laughter but with fear.

Then he seemed to recover himself. With a swollen arm, he heaved himself upright upon the divan.

"My dearest mother," his liquid voice caressed the golden woman, maliciously sweet, "the key of my fate may be in your hands. But the machine has told me this: you will never destroy me. For you love me, Athonee—the machine told me that.

"Hate and rage and scorn you may mingle with that love. Yet always it will be strong enough to stay your purpose to destroy me."

His gross bulk quivered again with laughter.

"Perhaps you have power to destroy me, Athonee — though I believe in my heart that your secret is but a clever lie. But an old love makes you helpless. And now again I ask you why you came here. Perhaps you wish to play in this new game of mine?"

The woman Athonee had turned away from Kane and Shiela to face the man upon the divan. She stood very straight. A faint, ruddy glow had come into her golden skin. Her small, red mouth was hard with angry scorn, and her long black eyes were flashing.

"I have come to stop your cruel game, Aru," her golden voice pealed out, "or to change the rules of it. I have endured much of you, my son. But this new thing you call a jest is monstrous cruelty. The mad horror of it is enough to kill my love for you—and with it, you.

"I have come to forbid you to slay Kane Montel. And to forbid you to take this woman, Shiela Hall, for your monstrous game, unwillingly."

With the barrel of his silver-robed torso propped upright upon the divan, supported by the great soft pillars of his arms, Aru stared a long time at her. His veiled, greenish eyes were contemptuous, mocking. Presently he began to laugh again, so that he gasped and shook.

"You say unwillingly, my mother," his soft voice inquired, when the tremors of laughter had stopped. "But if Shiela Hall should come to me willingly, to play the game as I choose—what then?"

The golden woman slowly turned. Her long black eyes rested upon Kane and Shiela. Framed in the snow of her hair, her elfin, pointed face was softened with tenderest pity. A glitter of tears brightened her eyes.

She swung abruptly back to Aru.

"My son," she said, "if anything will make this woman surrender her lover, and give herself to you, then I will know that my life has failed. I will know that humanity can never rise above the machine. My greatest hope will be dead.

"Yes, my son, if Shiela Hall abandons her lover, to give herself willingly to you, then I shall return to the lower caverns—for ever. I will give you the secret that is my power over you, and unlock the sector of your fate closed to the machine. I will creep into the crypt that I have made to hold my bones, and die."

Very tall and very straight she stood, the red-bound silver of her luxuriant hair falling behind the darkness of her gown. The rosy light was higher in the gold of her smooth skin. Her fine shoulders quivered a little with emotion, and her long black eyes were burning.

"I made the machine when I was alone, when my last fellow-being was dead, here on the moon. I made the machine to lift your kind from the jungles to civilization, Kane Montel, and to guide it past the pitfalls of weakness and passion that destroyed my own kind.

"I failed, in the beginning, to take account of the weakness of my ill-fated kind, in myself. Yet I struggled ever to build finer qualities in the new race. And if I have failed, you must perish, Kane Montel and Shiela Hall, and your kind with you."

Her eyes swept back to Aru.

"Therefore, my son, I submit. You may test this woman as you choose. And if her love of this man is a thing so weak that you can break it with the machine, then she and her race are fit only to die. And I will give up my secret and go into my mausoleum."

### 8. *"You Have Chosen . . . Go!"*

ARU stood up.

Watching the gross, quivering bulk of him upon the divan, Kane had thought it hardly possible that he could stand, even against the feeble lunar gravitation. But the mountain of his white flesh held an unsuspected strength. He stood without support upon the great shuddering pillars of his legs. One massive arm pointed at Shiela Hall.

The girl shrank away from him—away from the inordinate grossness of that pointing arm, away from the coldly avid, mocking leer in his small, greenish eyes. Trembling, she drew close to Kane.

Aru spoke in venomed tones of honeyed caress.

"Shiela Hall, my darling," he said softly, "since my mad mother demands it, I will change my plans for finishing the jest of mankind, and for playing my new game with you. And I will offer you a choice."

He paused. Malicious promise glittered in his hard eyes.

Shiela quivered in the hard curve of Kane's big arm. The beat of her heart, against his side, seemed light and rapid as a bird's. She was breathless, tense, straining. All the color had ebbed out of her milk-white skin. Her wide eyes were staring at Aru, fascinated, purple with dread.

"Come to me, if you choose, Shiela Hall," cooed the limpid tones of Aru. "Give to me your beauty. Take me for your master, and accept my will in everything.

"Give yourself to me, and so long as your lover shall live, you may be mistress of the machine of destiny. You may guide

the *Spirit of Man* safely back to Earth, with Kane Montel upon it. Upon the earth, you may order his fate—and the fate of all men—as you please.

"So long as Kane lives, you may rule destiny. You may give him anything you like: fame, wealth, position, continued health. Anything — save yourself. You may give him, if you will, another woman, to take your place in his memories."

Aru's laughter came again, softly malicious.

"I know that your thoughts are largely of Kane. Yet your power will extend over the lives of all men. You may, if you will, stop the threatened war. You may order for humanity such an era of peace and achievement and happiness as the earth has never known—for so long as Kane may live.

"For your own comfort, I offer you the freedom of my dwellings on the moon, and the full service of my retainers, the full enjoyment of my possessions.

"But when Kane is dead, I shall be free to finish the jest of man—and the new jest I plan for you—in the way of my own choosing.

"That, Shiela darling, is one alternative."

Aru swayed ponderously forward. His gross arm still pointed at Shiela. His huge body was yet quivering a little with malicious laughter.

Crouching against Kane's arm, Shiela drew breath with a painful little sob. She watched Aru silently. Her eyes were still dilated with the purple of terror.

"The other alternative, my dear," the dulcet tones flowed on, "is to return to Earth with Kane Montel. Through the machine, I shall see that you reach Earth alive. I will promise you both life—for so long as either of you may desire."

Softly, mockingly, he chuckled.

"But let the machine picture for you the fate that shall be yours if you choose to leave me."

Aru turned. He lowered himself heavily into a sitting position upon the divan. The divan glided smoothly forward until his thick arms could reach the ring-shaped control table. Not without skill, his thick fingers moved over the innumerable keys and dials and levers.

Above the table, the vivid image of the earth slowly spun. And a screen before him glowed with colored life.

Kane and Shiela moved silently to face the screen. Stately, golden Athonee came to stand beside the divan. Vethlo, still lying on the floor, caressing his injured knee, looked up with weary darkness in his tragic eyes.

"Your return, my dear ones," the voice of Aru caressed Kane and Shiela.

KANE saw upon the screen a dark horizon of tossing gray sea, misted with spindrift, whipped with sleet and rain. Heavy with sullen clouds, the sky was lurid with angry lightning.

Out of that mad sky, the silvery, humped spindle of the *Spirit of Man* came driving down. It plunged into the wild, green water. It sank and rose in a geyser of froth. It drifted, low in the water, sluggish. Evidently it was crippled, sinking.

Rocks loomed ahead, dark fangs shredding the sea to white ribbons. The impulse flyer drove down upon them, helpless. It was lost in a smother of snowy spray. It was tossed high, impaled on a spear of stone.

Kane glimpsed Shiela's white-clad slenderness, his own hard bulk. For a moment they were clinging to the low deck-railing, battered against the hull. Then they were carried away into the madness of the sea.

"Both of you, my dears, shall survive," the honeyed poison of Aru's voice assured

them. "Mark that well. Yet the elements shall separate you then—for ever. You, Kane Montel, shall reach the shore, swimming. And you, Shiela Hall, shall be picked up by a fishing-boat, and carried to the city of San Diego.

"Neither of you shall ever see the other again.

"Each of you, however—not quite believing me, for your love is stronger than reason—each of you shall ever hope to find the other.

"Your lives shall be long—full long. I think that neither of you shall ever wish to die—your irrational hope will be too strong for that. But even if you should, the machine can guard your lives for me. It can break the noose, and turn the blade from your throats.

"I need not show you all that awaits you, back upon the earth. A glimpse will be enough."

His gross fingers went back to the dials.

"Let us see Kane Montel," he said, "after five years."

Upon the screen, with the same startlingly vivid distinctness, appeared the roaring canyon of a street in some great city. Chill twilight filled it. A bleak wind swept it with fine snow. A certain strangeness in the attire of the rushing crowd, in the design of the swiftly gliding stream-lined vehicles, convinced Kane that it was indeed a vision of the future.

He saw a man, stumbling against the human tide. Powerful he was, and yet half broken. His great shoulders sagged wearily. His hard face was drawn, lined, haggard. His thinning hair seemed prematurely white. His sunken eyes were burning wells of hope and grim despair.

His clothing, Kane saw, was pitifully ragged, inadequate against the freezing blast that whipped him. The pinch of hunger was on his lean face, the blue of cold on cheeks and gnarled hands. His body was scarred, twisted, from old injuries.

Fighting the wind and the pressure of the hastening throng, he was lurching forward. His hollow, burning eyes peered anxiously into every woman's face, and ever they looked on again, with renewed hope and renewed despair.

Kane gazed at that tortured figure for a long moment, with pity welling up in him, before he recognized it for—himself!

The man turned toward the pavement. Lighting with abrupt joy, his eyes fastened on a passing vehicle. Crying out in hoarse eagerness, he leapt toward it. It paused. The woman in it seemed to have the form of Shiela. But when she looked out, her face was coldly strange.

The vehicle leapt ahead again. The man reeled upon the pavement, dazed with new despair. He staggered back, too late. Another rushing vehicle grazed him, flung him down motionless upon the pave, glided on.

Shiela, her terrified eyes fixed on the screen, cried out in pain.

"Never fear, my darling," the voice of Aru softly reassured her. "Your lover shall be hurt many times, through the many decades that he shall search for you. But killed—never.

"And now," the pitiless sweetness of his tones went on, "let us see the woman, Shiela Hall, when a few years more have gone."

His thick fingers moved with a curious, astonishing deftness over the intricate controls. Within the circular table, the bright image of the planet once more spun and shifted.

"The final war is ending now," said Aru. "For ten years the world has been devastated with atomic bombs, until no nation has the men or money or machines to make more of them. Everywhere are growing patches of gray, flaming dust—

the leprous cancers upon the planet that were the gift of your father, Kane Montel. Yet, in the twilight of man, there is war still—even if it must be fought with weapons less noble than atomic bombs. And we now look upon a battlefield of the dying planet."

THE screen shone again.

A flat plain filled it, desolate and vast. All the background was filled with a smooth sea of dust. It was leprous gray. And it shone with a faint, prismatic glow—with the eternal, destroying fire of disintegrating atoms of iron.

Beyond that plain, the sun was setting. Its blood-red disk rested upon the straight horizon. It barred the evening sky with rays of sinister scarlet, and washed the dead plain with a terrible, ominous illumination.

Upon the plain lay the ruin of a city. It was dead, and the dust had overwhelmed it. Here and there loomed vast, dark piles of debris. Black, bare girders crossed the face of the sinking sun, like the naked ribs of a skeleton.

In the foreground, at the bottom of the screen, was a little barren, rocky eminence that the consuming dust had not yet reached. Among its gullies and boulders and gnarled thickets, Kane saw, were scattered the bodies of men newly dead.

Here and there was a smashed rifle or a broken sword. But no serviceable weapon or useful article had been left. The white, mutilated corpses were stripped of clothing. No wounded man had been left alive. Upon the hill was no movement save that of the black wings of vultures; nor any sound save their raucous cries.

Then a living human figure came struggling into the scene. It was a thin woman, haggard with suffering and privation, bent with weary pain. She wore tattered rags. Her gaunt body was hideous with the scars of disease and injury.

Trembling with weakness, she staggered up the hill. She crept from one nude, silent horror to another, searching. The sun sank. Red, dreadful twilight shrouded the leprous plain, the dead upon the hill, the vultures, the woman.

Quivering, his very soul ripped with the stark talons of horror, Kane drew his arm tight around Shiela's body and swung her away from the screen — for the woman had been Shiela.

"Don't look any more, kid," he muttered. "Too much."

"I think," said the liquid voice of Aru, "that you have seen enough.

"You shall have three days together as the *Spirit of Man* returns. Enjoy them well," he chuckled, "for you shall be separated when it falls into the sea. Through the rest of your lives—and they shall be long lives—you shall search, each for the other.

"You shall search through the crumbling wreck of a doomed world. Cities shall be overwhelmed about you, nations burned in atomic flame. Horror and ruin and death shall creep upon you daily. Both of you shall know fear and injury and pain. Yet neither of you shall die—until I will it.

"Perhaps, Kane Montel, I will let you be the last man alive—overwhelmed when the dust reaches that stone hut by the polar sea. And perhaps Shiela Hall may be the last woman, searching for you among the dead of another continent."

The divan rolled back from the curving control-board.

Aru once more heaved himself upright. A quivering mountain of gross flesh, he stood looking down at Shiela. She was still crouching close against Kane.

Again his swollen arm pointed at her.

"Now, Shiela Hall," came the high-

pitched sweetness of his voice, "you may choose.

"Remain on the moon, to be mine. Send your lover back to Earth, and be mistress of his destiny—and of all Earth's fate—for so long as Kane may live. Send all the good things you will to your lover; and peace and progress and happiness to all the earth.

"Or return with Kane. Enjoy three days with him, and lose him when you reach the earth. And spend a long life searching for him, ever hoping, ever frustrated by fate—by the machine of destiny. Search for ever, vainly, in a doomed, dying world. And die, when I allow you, with your lover never found."

SILENTLY, Shiela's white face was lifted to Kane's. Her purple, terror-distended eyes dwelt in his. He took her tense shoulders, and swung her a little away from him, and looked long down into her face. No words passed between them.

Athonee was standing a little apart from them. Slender and erect and tall, she was a statue of pallid gold, striking in the scarlet-shot darkness of her revealing gown. Her pointed, elfin face wore a look of tenderest pity. Her long black eyes were fixed upon the two, big with suffering compassion.

Shiela looked up at her, suddenly, with quick, pleading inquiry upon her pain-drawn face. Some ray of understanding, Kane thought, passed between them. But Athonee shook her snowy head.

Her golden voice pealed out, vibrant with pity:

"I cannot help you, Shiela," she said. "You must choose."

And Shiela looked back to Kane, and seemed to find in his lean face a serene strength.

She swung quietly to face Aru, and moved a little toward him, and told him, in a strong, composed voice:

"I will go back with Kane."

The white mountain of Aru's flesh, for a moment, was perfectly still. His gross features sagged slowly. His mouth opened to a small, perfect ring of surprize. His greenish eyes widened unbelievingly.

Then, as he understood, rage mounted within him. Red flamed in his skin. His huge body trembled. His great hands doubled convulsively. His face was drawn into a buttery mask of fury that left his eyes greenish, malevolent slits.

"You choose to return," he gasped shrilly, "after all you have seen?"

"I do," said Shiela quietly, "because I love him."

"Then go back," said Aru.

The softness of his voice had turned to strident, dreadful rage.

"And you shall be torn apart when the flyer is wrecked. And you shall search for each other for ever. And the machine of destiny shall send upon you every agony, every extreme of suffering and despair, that it is possible for you to endure.

"You have chosen. Go."

**The weird events that bring this story to a fascinating conclusion in next month's issue will hold your interest to the last word. Reserve your copy at your magazine dealer's now.**

"The stars would change in a most peculiar manner, so that the Great Ones could come pulsing from the outer gulf."

# The Faceless God

By ROBERT BLOCH

*A tremendous story of a fearful trek across the Egyptian desert, and the malignant stone idol that waited for the doctor's return*

THE thing on the torture-rack began to moan. There was a grating sound as the lever stretched the iron bed still one more space in length. The moaning grew to a piercing shriek of utter agony.

"Ah," said Doctor Stugatche, "we have him at last."

He bent over the tortured man on the iron grille and smiled tenderly into the anguished face. His eyes, tinged with delicate amusement, took in every detail of the body before him—the swollen legs, raw and angry from the embrace of the fiery boot; the lacerated back and shoulders, still crimson from the kiss of the lash; the bloody, mangled remnants of a chest crushed by the caress of the Spiked Coffin. With gentle solicitude he surveyed the finishing touches applied by the rack itself—the dislocated shoulders and twisted torso; the crushed and broken fingers, and the dangling tendons in the lower limbs. Then he turned his attention to the old man's tormented countenance once again. He laughed, softly, in a voice like the tinkling of a bell. Then he spoke.

"Well, Hassan. I do not think you will prove stubborn any longer in the face of such — ah — eloquent persuasion. Come now; tell me where I can find this idol of which you speak."

The butchered victim began to sob, and the doctor was forced to kneel beside the bed of pain in order to understand his incoherent mumblings. For perhaps twenty minutes the creature groaned on, and then at last fell silent. Doctor Stugatche rose to his feet once more, a satisfied twinkle in his genial eyes. He made a brief motion to one of the blacks operating the rack machinery. The fellow nodded, and went over to the living horror on the instrument. It was crying now —its tears were blood. The black drew his sword. It swished upward, then cleaved down once again. There was a dull sound of crunching impact, and then a tiny fountain spurted upward, spreading a scarlet blot upon the wall behind. . . .

Doctor Stugatche went out of the room, bolted the door behind him, and climbed the steps to the house above. As he raised the barred trap-door he saw that the sun was shining. The doctor began to whistle. He was very pleased.

2

He had good reason to be. For several years the doctor had been what is vulgarly known as an "adventurer." He had been a smuggler of antiques, an exploiter of labor on the Upper Nile, and had at times sunk so low as to participate in the forbidden "black goods trade" that flourished at certain ports along the Red Sea. He had come out to Egypt many years ago as an attaché on an archeological expedition, from which he had been summarily dismissed. The reason for his dismissal is not known, but it was rumored that he had been caught trying to appropriate certain of the expeditionary trophies. After his exposure and subsequent disgrace, he had disappeared for a while. Several years later he had come back to Cairo and set up an establishment in the native quarter. It was here that he fell into the unscrupulous habits of business which had earned for him a dubious reputation and a sizable profit. He seemed well satisfied with both.

At the present time he was a man of perhaps forty-five years of age, short and heavy-set, with a bullet-shaped head that rested on broad, ape-like shoulders. His thick torso and bulging paunch were supported by a pair of spindly legs that contrasted oddly with the upper portions of his beefy body. Despite his Falstaffian appearance he was a hard and ruthless man. His piggish eyes were filled with greed; his fleshy mouth was lustful; his only natural smile was one of avarice.

It was his covetous nature that had led him into his present adventure. Ordinarily he was not a credulous man. The usual tales of lost pyramids, buried treasure and stolen mummies did not impress

him. He preferred something more substantial. A contraband consignment of rugs; a bit of smuggled opium; something in the line of illicit human merchandise—these were things he could appreciate and understand.

But this case was different. Extraordinary as it sounded, it meant big money. Stugatche was smart enough to know that many of the great discoveries of Egyptology had been prompted by just such wild rumors as the one he had heard. He also knew the difference between improbable truth and spurious invention. This story sounded like the truth.

In brief, it ran as follows. A certain party of nomads, while engaged in a secret journey with a cargo of illegitimately obtained goods, were traversing a special route of their own. They did not feel that the regular caravan lanes were healthful for them to follow. While traveling near a certain spot they had accidentally espied a curious rock or stone in the sands. The thing had evidently been buried, but long years of shifting and swirling among the dunes above it had served to uncover a portion of the object. They had stopped to inspect it at closer range, and thereby made a startling discovery. The thing projecting from the sand was the head of a statue; an ancient Egyptian statue, with the triple crown of a god! Its black body was still submerged, but the head seemed to be in perfect preservation. It was a very peculiar thing, that head, and none of the natives could or would recognize the deity, though the caravan leaders questioned them closely. The whole thing was an unfathomable mystery. A perfectly preserved statue of an unknown god buried all alone in the southern desert, a long way from any oasis, and two hundred miles from the smallest village!

Evidently the caravan men realized something of its uniqueness; for they ordered that two boulders which lay near by be placed on top of the idol as a marker in case they ever returned. The men did as they were ordered, though they were obviously reluctant, and kept muttering prayers beneath their breath. They seemed very much afraid of the buried image, but only reiterated their ignorance when questioned further concerning it.

After the boulders had been placed, the expedition was forced to journey on, for time did not permit them to unearth the curious figure in its entirety, or attempt to carry it with them. When they returned to the north they told their story, and as most tales were in the habit of doing, it came to the ears of Doctor Stugatche. Stugatche thought fast. It was quite evident that the original discoverers of the idol did not attach any great importance to their find. For this reason the doctor might easily return to the spot and unearth the statue without any trouble, once he knew exactly where it was located.

Stugatche felt that it was worth finding. If it had been a treasure yarn, now, he would have scoffed and unhesitatingly put it down as a cock-and-bull story of the usual variety. But an idol—that was different. He could understand why an ignorant band of Arab smugglers might ignore such a discovery. He could also realize that such a discovery might prove more valuable to him than all the treasure in Egypt. It was easy for him to remember the vague clues and wild hints that had prompted the findings of early explorers. They had followed up many blind leads when first they plumbed the pyramids and racked the temple ruins. All of them were tomb-looters at heart, but their ravishings had made them rich and famous. Why not him, then? If the tale were true, and this idol not only buried, but totally unknown as a deity; in perfect condition, and in such an out-of-

the-way locality—these facts would create a furor when he exhibited his find. He would be famous! Who knew what hitherto untrodden fields he might open up in archeology? It was well worth chancing.

But he must not arouse any suspicion. He dared not inquire about the place from any of the Arabs who had been there. That would immediately cause talk. No, he must get his directions from a native in the band. Accordingly, two of his servants picked up Hassan, the old camel-driver, and brought him before Stugatche in his house. But Hassan, when questioned, looked very much afraid. He refused to talk. So Stugatche, as we have seen, conducted him into his little reception room in the cellar, where he had been wont to entertain certain recalcitrant guests in the past. Here the doctor, whose knowledge of anatomy stood him in good stead, was able to cajole his visitor into speaking, by the methods we have just witnessed.

So Doctor Stugatche emerged from the cellar in a very pleasant frame of mind. He was rubbing his fat hands when he looked at the map to verify his information, and he went out to dinner with a smiling face.

Two days later he was ready to start. He had hired a small number of natives, so as not to excite undue investigation, and given out to his business acquaintances that he was about to embark on a special trip. He engaged a strange dragoman, and made sure that the fellow would keep his mouth shut. There were several swift camels in the train, and a number of extra donkeys harnessed to a large empty cart. He took food and water for six days, for he intended to return via river-boat. After the arrangements were completed, the party assembled one morning at a certain spot unknown to official eyes, and the expedition began.

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It was on the morning of the fourth day that they arrived at last. Stugatche saw the stones from his precarious perch atop the leading camel. He swore delightedly, and despite the hovering heat, dismounted and raced over to the spot where the two boulders lay. A moment later he called the company to a hasty halt and issued orders for the immediate erection of the tents, and the usual preparations for encampment. Utterly disregarding the intolerable warmth of the day, he saw to it that the sweating natives did a thorough job; and then, without allowing them a moment's rest, he instructed them to remove the massive rocks from their resting-place. A crew of straining men managed to topple them over at last, and clear away the underlying sand.

In a few moments there was a loud cry from the gang of laborers, as a black and sinister head came into view. It was a triple-crowned blasphemy. Great spiky cones adorned the top of the ebony diadem, and beneath them were hidden intricately executed designs. He bent down and examined them. They were monstrous, both in subject and in execution. He saw the writhing, worm-like shapes of primal monsters, and headless, slimy creatures from the stars. There were bloated beasts in the robes of men, and ancient Egyptian gods in hideous combat with squirming demons from the gulf. Some of the designs were foul beyond description, and others hinted of unclean terrors that were old when the world was young. But all were evil; and Stugatche, cold and callous though he was, could not gaze at them without feeling a horror that ate at his brain.

As for the natives, they were openly frightened. The moment that the top of the image came into view, they began to jabber hysterically. They retreated to the

side of the excavation and began to argue and mumble, pointing occasionally at the statue, or at the kneeling figure of the doctor. Absorbed in his inspection, Stugatche failed to catch the body of their remarks, or note the air of menace which radiated from the sullen dragoman. Once or twice he heard some vague references to the name "Nyarlathotep", and a few allusions to "The Demon Messenger".

After completing his scrutiny, the doctor rose to his feet and ordered the men to proceed with the excavation. No one moved. Impatiently he repeated his command. The natives stood by, their heads hung, but their faces were stolid. At last the dragoman stepped forward and began to harangue the *effendi*.

He and his men would never have come with their master had they known what they were expected to do. They would not touch the statue of the god, and they warned the doctor to keep his hands off. It was bad business to incur the wrath of the Old God—the Secret One. But perhaps he had not heard of Nyarlathotep. He was the oldest god of all Egypt; of all the world. He was the God of Resurrection, and the Black Messenger of Karneter. There was a legend that one day he would arise and bring the olden dead to life. And his curse was one to be avoided.

Stugatche, listening, began to lose his temper. Angrily he interrupted, ordering the men to stop gawking and resume their work. He backed up this command with two Colt .32 revolvers. He would take all the blame for this desecration, he shouted, and he was not afraid of any damned stone idol in the world.

The natives seemed properly impressed both by the revolvers and by his fluent profanity. They began to dig again, timidly averting their eyes from the statue's form.

A few hours' work sufficed for the men to uncover the idol. If the crown of its stony head had hinted of horror, the face and body openly proclaimed it. The image was obscene and shockingly malignant. There was an indescribably *alien* quality about it—it was ageless, unchanging, eternal. Not a scratch marred its black and crudely chiseled surface; during all its many-centuried burial there had been no weathering upon the fiendishly carven features. Stugatche saw it now as it must have looked when it was first buried, and the sight was not good to see.

It resembled a miniature sphinx — a life-sized sphinx with the wings of a vulture and the body of a hyena. There were talons and claws, and upon the squatting, bestial body rested a massive, anthropomorphic head, bearing the ominous triple crown whose dread designs had so singularly excited the natives. But the worst and by far the most hideous feature was the lack of a face upon the ghastly thing. It was a faceless god; the winged, faceless god of ancient myth—Nyarlathotep, Mighty Messenger, Stalker among the Stars, and Lord of the Desert.

When Stugatche completed his examination at last, he became almost hysterically happy. He grinned triumphantly into that blank and loathsome countenance—grinned into that faceless orifice that yawned as vacantly as the black void beyond the suns. In his enthusiasm he failed to notice the furtive whispers of the natives and the guides, and disregarded their fearsome glances at the unclean eidolon. Had he not done so, he would have been a wiser man; for these men knew, as all Egypt knows, that Nyarlathotep is the Master of Evil.

Not for nothing had his temples been demolished, his statues destroyed, and his priestcraft crucified in the olden days. There were dark and terrible reasons for

prohibiting his worship, and omitting his name from the *Book of the Dead.* All references to the Faceless One were long since deleted from the Sacred Manuscripts, and great pains had been taken to ignore some of his godly attributes, or assign them to some milder deity. In Thoth, Set, Bubastis and Sebek we can trace some of the Master's grisly endowments. It was he, in the most archaic of the chronicles, who was ruler of the Underworld. It was he who became the patron of sorcery and the black arts. Once he alone had ruled, and men knew him in all lands, under many names. But that time passed. Men turned away from the worship of evil, and reverenced the good. They did not care for the gruesome sacrifice the Dark God demanded, nor the way his priests ruled. At last the cult was suppressed, and by common consent all references to it were for ever banned, and its records destroyed. But Nyarlathotep had come out of the desert, according to the legend, and to the desert he now returned. Idols were set up in hidden places among the sands, and here the thin, fanatical ranks of true believers still leapt and capered in naked worship, where the cries of shrieking victims echoed only to the ears of the night.

So his legend remained and was handed down in the secret ways of the earth. Time passed. In the north the ice-flow receded, and Atlantis fell. New peoples overran the land, but the desert folk remained. They viewed the building of the pyramids with amused and cynical eyes. Wait, they counseled. When the Day arrived at last, Nyarlathotep again would come out of the desert, and then wo unto Egypt! For the pyramids would shatter into dust, and temples crumble to ruin. Sunken cities of the sea would rise, and there would be famine and pestilence throughout the land. The stars would change in a most peculiar way, so that the Great Ones could come pulsing from the outer gulf. Then the beasts should give tongue, and prophesy in their anthropoglotism that man shall perish. By these signs, and other apocalyptic portents, the world would know that Nyarlathotep had returned. Soon he himself would be visible—a dark, faceless man in black, walking, staff in hand, across the desert, but leaving no track to mark his way, save that of death. For wherever his footsteps turned, men would surely die, until at last none but true believers remained to welcome him in worship with the Mighty Ones from the gulfs.

Such, in its essence, was the fable of Nyarlathotep. It was older than secret Egypt, more hoary than sea-doomed Atlantis, more ancient than time-forgotten Mu. But it has never been forgotten. In the mediæval times this story and its prophecy were carried across Europe by returning crusaders. Thus the Mighty Messenger became the Black Man of the witch-covens; the emissary of Asmodeus and darker gods. His name is mentioned cryptically in the *Necronomicon,* for Alhazred heard it whispered in tales of shadowed Irem. The fabulous *Book of Eibon* hints at the myth in veiled and diverse ways, for it was writ in a far-off time when it was not yet deemed safe to speak of things that had walked upon the earth when it was young. Ludvig Prinn, who traveled in Saracenic lands and learned strange sorceries, awesomely implies his knowledge in the infamous *Mysteries of the Worm.*

But his worship, in late years, seems to have died out. There is no mention of it in Sir James Frazer's *Golden Bough,* and most reputable ethnologists and anthropologists are frankly ignorant of the Faceless One's history. But there are idols still intact, and some whisper of certain caverns beneath the Nile, and of burrows below the Ninth Pyramid. The secret

signs and symbols of his worship are gone, but there are some undecipherable hieroglyphs in the Government vaults which are very closely concealed. And men know. By word of mouth the tale has come down through the ages, and there are those who still wait for the Day. By common consent there seem to be certain spots in the desert which are carefully avoided by caravans, and several secluded shrines are shunned by those who remember. For Nyarlathotep is the God of the Desert, and his ways are best left unprofaned.

It was this knowledge which prompted the uneasiness of the natives upon the discovery of that peculiar idol in the sand. When they had first noted the head-dress they had been afraid, and after seeing that featureless face they became frantic with dread. As for Doctor Stugatche, his fate did not matter to them. They were concerned only with themselves, and their course was plainly apparent. They must flee, and flee at once.

Stugatche paid no attention to them. He was busy making plans for the following day. They would place the idol on a wheeled cart and harness the donkeys. Once back to the river it could be put on board the steamer. What a find! He conjured up pleasant visions of the fame and fortune that would be his. Scavenger, was he? Unsavory adventurer, eh? Charlatan, cheat, impostor, they had called him. How those smug official eyes would pop when they beheld his discovery! Heaven only knew what vistas this thing might open up. There might be other altars, other idols; tombs and temples too, perhaps. He knew vaguely that there was some absurd legend about the worship of this deity, but if he could only get his hands on a few more natives who could give him the information he wanted. . . . He smiled, musingly. Funny, those superstitious myths! The boys were afraid of the statue; that was plainly apparent. The dragoman, now, with his stupid quotations. How did it go? "Nyarlathotep is the Black Messenger of Karneter. He comes from out the desert, across the burning sands, and stalks his prey throughout the world, which is the land of his domain." Silly! All Egyptian myths were stupid. Statues with animal heads suddenly coming to life; reincarnation of men and gods, foolish kings building pyramids for mummies. Well, a lot of fools believed it; not only the natives, either. He knew some cranks who credited the stories about the Pharaoh's curse, and the magic of the old priests. There were a lot of wild tales about the ancient tombs and the men who died when they invaded them. No wonder his own simple natives believed such trash! But whether they believed it or not, they were going to move his idol, damn them, even if he had to shoot them down to make them obey.

He went into his tent, well satisfied. The boy served him his meal, and Stugatche dined heartily as was his wont. Then he decided to retire early, in anticipation of his plans for the following morning. The boys could tend to the camp, he decided. Accordingly he lay down on his cot and soon fell into a contented, peaceful slumber.

4

It must have been several hours later that he awoke. It was very dark, and the night was strangely still. Once he heard the far-away howl of a hunting jackal, but it soon blended into somber silence. Surprized at his sudden awakening, Stugatche rose and went to the door of the tent, pulling back the flap to gaze into the open. A moment later he cursed in frenzied rage.

The camp was deserted! The fire had died out, the men and camels had disappeared. Foot-prints, already half obliterated by the sands, showed the silent haste in which the natives had departed. The fools had left him here alone!

He was lost. The knowledge sent a sudden stab of fear to his heart. Lost! The men were gone, the food was gone, the camels and donkeys had disappeared. He had neither weapons nor water, and he was all alone. He stood before the door of the tent and gazed, terrified, at the vast and lonely desert. The moon gleamed like a silver skull in an ebony sky. A sudden hot wind ruffled the endless ocean of sand, and sent it skirling in tiny waves at his feet. Then came silence, ceaseless silence. It was like the silence of the tomb; like the eternal silence of the pyramids, where in crumbling sarcophagi the mummies lie, their dead eyes gazing into unchanging and unending darkness. He felt indescribably small and lonely there in the night, and he was conscious of strange and baleful powers that were weaving the threads of his destiny into a final tragic pattern. Nyarlathotep! He *knew,* and was wreaking an immutable vengeance.

But that was nonsense. He must not let himself be troubled by such fantastic rubbish. That was just another form of desert mirage; a common enough delusion under such circumstances. He must not lose his nerve now. He must face the facts calmly. The men had absconded with the supplies and the horses because of some crazy native superstition. That was real enough. As for the superstition itself, he must not let it bother him. Those frantic and morbid fancies of his would vanish quickly enough with the morning sun.

The morning sun! A terrible thought assailed him—the fearsome reality of the desert at midday. To reach an oasis he would be forced to travel day and night before the lack of food and water weakened him so that he could not go on. There would be no escape once he left this tent; no refuge from that pitiless blazing eye whose glaring rays could scorch his brain to madness. To die in the heat of the desert—that was an unthinkable agony. He must get back; his work was not yet completed. There must be a new expedition to recover the idol. He must get back! Besides, Stugatche did not want to die. His fat lips quivered with fear as he thought of the pain, the torture. He had no desire to suffer the anguish of that fellow he had put on the rack. The poor devil had not looked very pleasant there. Ah no, death was not for the doctor. He must hurry. But where?

He gazed around frantically, trying to get his bearings. The desert mocked him with its monotonous, inscrutable horizon. For a moment black despair clutched at his brain, and then came a sudden inspiration. He must go north, of course. And he recalled, now, the chance words let fall by the dragoman that afternoon. The statue of Nyarlathotep faced north! Jubilantly he ransacked the tent for any remnants of food or provisions. There were none. Matches and tobacco he carried, and in his kit he found a hunting-knife. He was almost confident when he left the tent. The rest of the journey would now be childishly simple. He would travel all night and make as much time as he could. His pack-blanket would probably shield him from the noonday sun tomorrow, and in late afternoon he would resume his course after the worst of the heat had abated. By quick marches tomorrow night, he ought to find himself near the Wadi Hassur oasis upon the following morning. All that remained for him to do was to get out to the idol and set his course, since the tracks of his party in the sand were already obscured.

Triumphantly, he strode across the camp-clearing to the excavation where the image stood. And it was there that he received his greatest shock.

The idol had been reinterred! The workmen had not left the statue violated, but had completely filled in the excavation, even taking the precaution of placing the two original stones over the top. Stugatche could not move them single-handed, and when he realized the extent of this calamity he was filled with an overpowering dismay. He was defeated. Cursing would do no good, and in his heart he could not even hope to pray. Nyarlathotep—Lord of the Desert!

It was with a new and deathly fear that he began his journey, choosing a course at random, and hoping against hope that the sudden clouds would lift so that he could have the guidance of the stars. But the clouds did not lift, and only the moon grinned grimly down at the stumbling figure that struggled through the sand.

Dervish dreams flitted through Stugatche's consciousness as he walked. Try as he might, the legend of the god haunted him with a sense of impending fulfilment. Vainly he tried to force his drugged mind to forget the suspicions that tormented it. He could not. Over and over again he found himself shivering with fear at the thought of a godly wrath pursuing him to his doom. He had violated a sacred spot, and the Old Ones remember . . . "his ways are best left unprofaned" . . . "God of the Desert" . . . that empty countenance. Stugatche swore viciously, and lumbered on, a tiny ant amid mountains of undulating sand.

5

SUDDENLY it was daylight. The sand faded from purple to violet, then suddenly suffused with an orchid glow. But Stugatche did not see it, for he slept. Long before he had planned, his bloated body had given way beneath the grueling strain, and the coming of dawn found him utterly weary and exhausted. His tired legs buckled under him and he collapsed upon the sand, barely managing to draw the blanket over him before he slept.

The sun crept across the brazen sky like a fiery ball of lava, pouring its molten rays upon the flaming sands. Stugatche slept on, but his sleep was far from pleasant. The heat brought him queer and disturbing dreams.

In them he seemed to see the figure of Nyarlathotep pursuing him on a nightmare flight across the desert of fire. He was running over a burning plain, unable to stop, while searing pain ate into his charred and blackened feet. Behind him strode the Faceless God, urging him onward with a staff of serpents. He ran on and on; but always that gruesome presence kept pace behind him. His feet became numbed by the scorching agony of the sand. Soon he was hobbling on ghastly, crumpled stumps, but despite the torture he dared not stop. The Thing behind him cackled in diabolical mirth, his gigantic laughter rising to the blazing sky.

Stugatche was on his knees now, his crippled legs eaten away into ashy stumps that smoldered acridly even as he crawled. Suddenly the desert became a lake of living flame into which he sank, his scorched body consumed by a blast of livid, unendurable torment. He felt the sand lick pitilessly at his arms, his waist, his very throat; and still his dying senses were filled with a monstrous dread of the Faceless One behind him—a dread transcending all pain. Even as he sank into that white-hot inferno he was feebly struggling on. The vengeance of the god must never overtake him! The heat was overpowering him now; it was frying his

cracked and bleeding lips, transforming his scorched body into one ghastly ember of burning anguish.

He raised his head for the last time before his boiling brain gave way beneath the agony. There stood the Dark One, and even as Stugatche watched he saw the lean, taloned hands reach out to touch his fiery face; saw the dreadful triple-crowned head draw near to him, so that he gazed for one grisly moment into that empty countenance. As he looked he seemed to see something in that black pit of horror—something that was staring at him from illimitable gulfs beyond—something with great flaming eyes that bored into his being with a fury greater than the fires that were consuming him. It told him, wordlessly, that his doom was sealed. Then came a burst of white-hot oblivion, and he sank into the seething sands, the blood bubbling in his veins. But the indescribable horror of that glimpse remained, and the last thing he remembered was the sight of that dreadful, empty countenance and the nameless fear behind it. Then he awoke.

For a moment his relief was so great that he did not notice the sting of the midday sun. Then, bathed in perspiration, he staggered to his feet and felt the stabbing rays bite into his back. He tried to shield his eyes and glance above to get his bearings, but the sky was a bowl of fire. Desperately, he dropped the blanket and began to run. The sand was clinging to his feet, slowing his pace and tripping him. It burned his heels. He felt an intolerable thirst. Already the demons of delirium danced madly in his head. He ran, endlessly, and his dream seemed to become a menacing reality. Was it coming true?

His legs *were* scorched, his body *was* seared. He glanced behind. Thank God there was no figure there—yet! Perhaps, if he kept a grip on himself, he might still make it, in spite of the time he had lost. He raced on. Perhaps a passing caravan—but no, it was far out of the caravan route. Tonight the sunset would give him an accurate course. Tonight.

Damn the heat! Sand all around him. Hills of it, mountains. All alike they were, like the crumbled, cyclopean ruins of titan cities. All were burning, smoldering in the fierce heat.

The day was endless. Time, ever an illusion, lost all meaning. Stugatche's weary body throbbed in bitter anguish, filling each moment with a new and deeper torment. The horizon never changed. No mirage marred the cruel, eternal vista; no shadow gave surcease from the savage glare.

But wait! Was there not a shadow *behind* him? Something dark and shapeless gloated at the back of his brain. A terrible thought pierced him with sudden realization. Nyarlathotep, God of the Desert! A shadow following him, driving him to destruction. Those legends—the natives warned him, his dreams warned him, even that dying creature on the rack. The Mighty Messenger always claims his own . . . a black man with a staff of serpents. . . . "He cometh from out the desert, across the burning sands, and stalketh his prey throughout the land of his domain."

Hallucination? Dared he glance back? He turned his fever-addled head. Yes! *It was true, this time!* There *was* something behind him, far away on the slope below; something black and nebulous that seemed to pad on stealthy feet. With a muttered curse, Stugatche began to run. Why had he ever touched that image? If he got out of this he would never return to the accursed spot again. The legends were true. God of the Desert!

He ran on, even though the sun showered bloody kisses on his brow. He was

beginning to go blind. There were dazzling constellations whirling before his eyes, and his heart throbbed a shrieking rhythm in his breast. But in his mind there was room for but one thought—escape.

His imagination began playing him strange tricks. He seemed to see statues in the sand—statues like the one he had profaned. Their shapes towered everywhere, writhing giant-like out of the ground and confronting his path with eery menace. Some were in attitudes with wings outspread, others were tentacled and snake-like, but all were faceless and triple-crowned. He felt that he was going mad, until he glanced back and saw that creeping figure now only a half-mile behind. Then he staggered on, screaming incoherently at the grotesque eidolons barring his way. The desert seemed to take on a hideous personality, as though all nature were conspiring to conquer him. The contorted outlines of the sand became imbued with malignant consciousness; the very sun took on an evil life. Stugatche moaned deliriously. Would night never come?

It came at last, but by that time Stugatche did not know it any more. He was a shambling, raving thing, wandering over the shifting sand, and the rising moon looked down on a thing that alternately howled and laughed. Presently the figure struggled to its feet and glanced furtively over its shoulder at a shadow that crept close. Then it began to run again, shrieking over and over again the single word, "Nyarlathotep." And all the while the shadow lurked just a step behind.

It seemed to be embodied with a strange and fiendish intelligence, for the shapeless adumbration carefully drove its victim forward in one definite direction, as if purposefully herding it toward an intended goal. The stars now looked upon a sight spawned of delirium — a man, chased across endlessly looming sands by a black shadow. Presently the pursued one came to the top of a hill and halted with a scream. The shadow paused in midair and seemed to wait.

Stugatche was looking down at the remains of his own camp, just as he had left it the night before, with the sudden awful realization that he had been driven in a circle back to his starting-point. Then, with the knowledge, came a merciful mental collapse. He threw himself forward in one final effort to elude the shadow, and raced straight for the two stones where the statue was buried.

Then occurred that which he had feared. For even as he ran, the ground before him quaked in the throes of a gigantic upheaval. The sand rolled in vast, engulfing waves, away from the base of the two boulders. Through the opening rose the idol, glistening evilly in the moonlight. And the oncoming sand from its base caught Stugatche as he ran toward it, sucking at his legs like a quicksand, and yawning at his waist. At the same instant the peculiar shadow rose and leapt forward. It seemed to merge with the statue in midair, a nebulous, animate mist. Then Stugatche, floundering in the grip of the sand, went quite insane with terror.

The formless statue gleamed living in the livid light, and the doomed man stared straight into its unearthly countenance. It was his dream come true, for behind that mask of stone he saw a face with eyes of yellow madness, and in those eyes he read death. The black figure spread its wings against the hills, and sank into the sand with a thunderous crash.

Thereafter nothing remained above the earth save a living head that twisted on the ground and struggled futilely to free

its imprisoned body from the iron embrace of the encircling sand. Its imprecations turned to frantic cries for mercy, then sank to a sob in which echoed the single word, "Nyarlathotep."

When morning came Stugatche was still alive, and the sun baked his brain into a hell of crimson agony. But not for long. The vultures winged across the desert plain and descended upon him, almost as if supernaturally summoned.

Somewhere, buried in the sands below, an ancient idol lay, and upon its featureless countenance there was the faintest hint of a monstrous, hidden smile. For even as Stugatche the unbeliever died, his mangled lips paid whispered homage to Nyarlathotep, Lord of the Desert.

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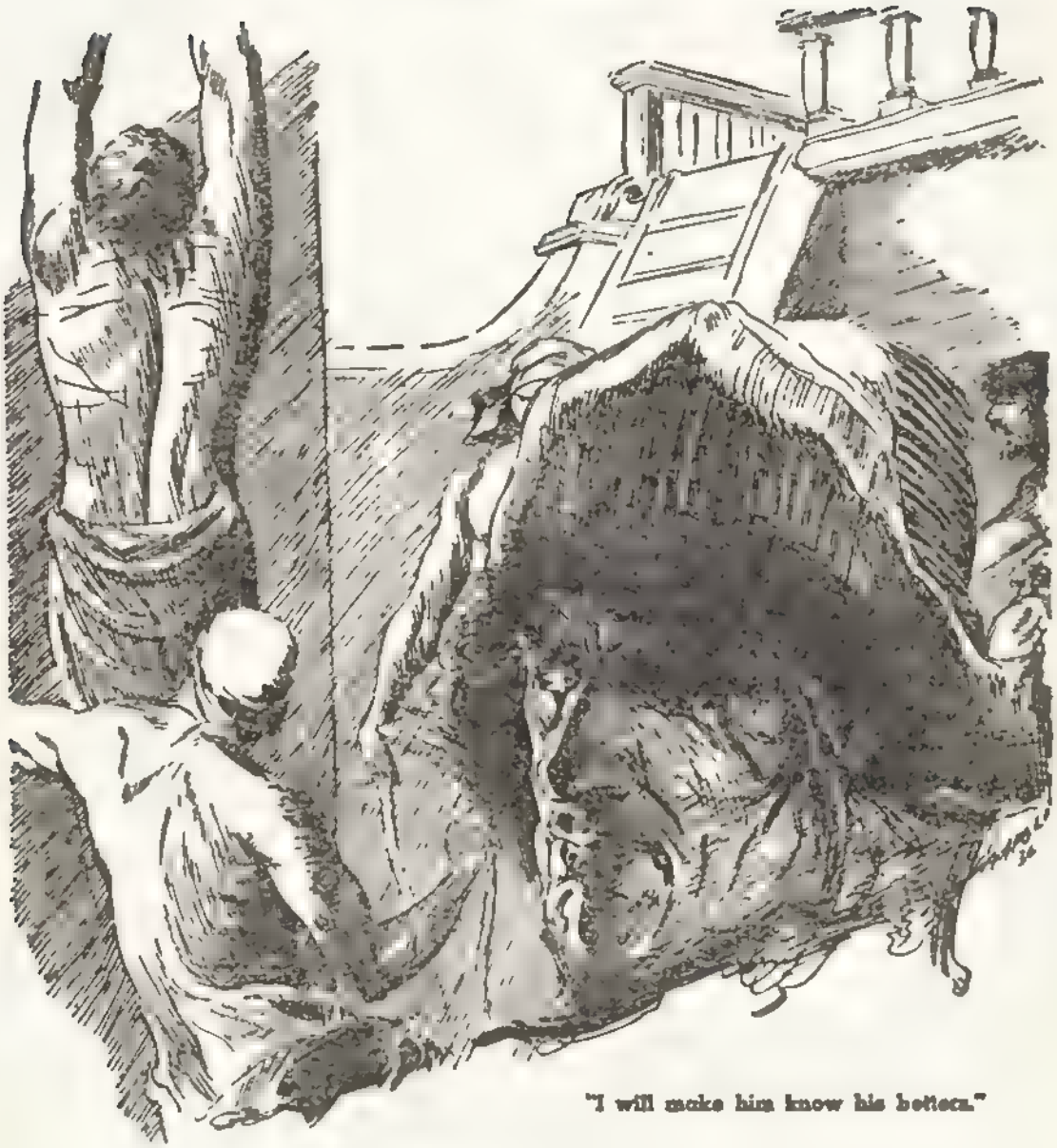
# Strange Interval

By SEABURY QUINN

*A curious and thrilling tale of pirates, and a man who was yet not a man, and an old obeah-woman who worked a strange witchery*

THEIR picture hangs in the great hall at Primrose Hill, that fine example of Virginia colonial architecture which has been the inspiration of so many of our more elaborate modern residences. It is no formal "conversation piece" such as the early portraitists were wont to paint, but the likeness of a man and woman who had found foretaste of heaven in each other. Colonel Willoughby Moncure Munro, brave in the white and scarlet uniform of Virginia Light Cavalry, sits beside his lady who is gowned in yellow taffeta and has her hair done high and powdered till it shines like carven silver. Their hands are clasped, and idolatry is in the look they give each other. Behind them is another face which seems to peer out from the shadows of the darkly painted background and is but half a shade removed from it. It is an aged face, a flat-nosed, thick-lipped Negro face surmounted by a turban of red-cotton stuff, and yet it is a lovely and a loving face, for its small eyes are bright and wise and very kind, and gaze with matriarchal love upon the Colonel and his lady.

THE sun was slipping down the sky late in the afternoon of the sixteenth of September in the year of our Lord 1686, and the second year of the short and stormy reign of James II, King, Defender of the Faith, etc., as young Master Willoughby Moncure Munro laid down his fishing-pole and turned to hoist the jib and staysail of his "buckeye". The rock fish had been biting well, and half a dozen of them trailed upon the osier hung overboard from the boat's stern. Master Willoughby had passed a pleasant afternoon on the St. Mary's River, fishing, dreaming, puffing at his long clay pipe, or just gazing at the quiet sunny water with a look of leisurely content. His studies of the law with Counsellor Joseph Henderson were over, and next term of court



"I will make him know his betters."

he would be admitted to the bar. Just now there were no tasks demanding his attention save the sailing of his sleek-lined little boat, a daily turn about the plantings on his bay mare Josephine, and an hour or two each day devoted to re-reading Coke, lest the learned justices of the high court should catch him unawares with some abstruse interrogation on the law of socage or free tenure. The dropping sun threw golden beams of light between the trees which grew as thick-set as a hedge along the river, but these grew fainter every moment. It was dark when Willoughby came out upon the confluence of the Potomac and St. Mary's, and a cool and veiling mist was coming from the waters. He threw his tiller sharply to the left and drew the lanyard of his leg o' mutton sail. Looming over him, gigantic as a mountain, ghostly as the specter of a phantom ship,

was a tall hull, the green waves slipping backward from its cutwater, no sign of light or life upon its decks.

"Ahoy, there! Hard a-larboard, or you'll run me down!" the young man cried, and as he called he saw a face look down at him and caught the glimmer of a leering, crack-toothed grin even as the schooner's prow came crashing down upon his boat, staving in its side as though it had been plank instead of hollowed log, and hurling him into the rushing back-wash. For a moment he fought desperately against the dragging weight of soaking clothes and the pressure of the water curling backward from the vessel's side, felt himself go down, thrust his head above the surface for a gasping, suffocating breath, then felt the rasping contact of a rope against his knuckles. His fingers closed upon it with the desperation of the drowning, and, half smothered by the backward-racing waves, he was dragged a little distance like a fish upon its hook, then was all but knocked unconscious as he banged against the schooner's sides when the rope was yanked abruptly from above.

A shaded lantern shed its tiny patch of light about the mainmast base as Willoughby was hauled across the rail unceremoniously, and by the feeble luminance he saw the butts of twelve-pound carronades ranged by the rail and, wrapped in canvas like a sheeted corpse, a heavier gun lashed fast and mounted upon traverse-slides. All merchant ships went armed, as Willoughby well knew, for there were desperate craft upon the sea; but this ship carried heavier metal than a sloop of war, yet plainly she was not a member of the King's navy, as a single glance around assured him.

The skipper stood below the mast, regarding him sardonically. He was slight of build though something above middle height, with a face as brown as copper from exposure to the sun and sea-wind. A wide-brimmed black-felt hat, trimmed with a diamond buckle, sat upon his long black hair, and a small mustache adorned his upper lip, while a neatly trimmed black beard projected from his chin. His shirt was finest cambric, ruffled at the front, with falls of lace at wrist and throat; about his waist was wrapped a scarlet sash in which was thrust a pair of silver-mounted pistols; a baldric of tan leather crossed his breast from right to left, supporting a rapier in the pommel of which blazed a monster ruby. His breeches were of wine-hued velvet, slashed and ruffled in the Spanish fashion, his bell-topped boots with cuffs turned down below his calves were yellow Spanish leather.

So much the astonished lad saw at a glance. It was not until his second look he realized the man's face was immobile as a mask, with eyes that held a coldly changeless look of utterly reptilian cruelty. About him grouped some members of his crew, savage, wolf-faced rascals, noxious off-scum of the seven seas.

Through fuddled senses one dread word smote Willoughby. Pirates! What the sea-rogues did so far upcoast he could not guess. The notched shoreline of Carolina swarmed with buccaneers, he knew, but there never had been corsairs in Potomac waters. He drew a deep breath, faced the cold-eyed man and asked:

"What mean ye by this scurvy business, sir? 'Tis lawless thus to run with no lights shown; ye wrecked my boat and well-nigh drowned me in the bargain. I'd thank ye to heave to and lower a boat——"

The pirate captain turned to a lieutenant, a venomous-looking little yellow man with strangely slanting eyes who wore, besides a pair of cotton drawers, a cutlas, a brace of pistols and diamond ear-rings as sole costume. "Would ye say

he'd bring ten pounds at market, Pipo?" he asked in an oddly clacking, toneless voice.

*"Si, Señor Capitán,"* the other answered with a leer. "Eleven, maybe, but certainly not twelve."

"Stow him below, then, till we need him in the morning; then Barnaby can show him how to wield a holystone."

A WAVE of something close akin to nausea swept through Willoughby as he heard the pirate's order. Not content with disregarding every rule of river traffic and cutting down his boat, the knaves were bent on kidnapping. He must put a bold face on. "I'd have ye know that I am Master Willoughby Moncure Munro, of Primrose Hill," he told them haughtily. "I'm a Virginia gentleman, and if ye think that ye can carry me away——"

The pirate skipper turned and nodded to an understanding group of ruffians who apparently were waiting for the signal. Before the startled youth could raise a hand to help himself he hit the deck with four stout scoundrels grappling at his arms and legs. In a moment he was stripped of shirt and singlet, hustled forward to a raised hatch-grating and lashed as firmly to the wooden bars as though he had been nailed there, his arms spread out so high that reach and strive as he would, he could not get his feet down to the deck. Thus hung, as though in crucifixion, he was beaten with ropes' ends by the seamen, blows falling alternately, rhythmically, unhurriedly, inexorably. The first blow of the knotted rope bruised his tender back, raising a red weal that turned to purple almost as it formed. A second lash cut crosswise on the first, and tiny gouts of blood stood out upon the tortured skin. Blow after blow descended, the beaters drawing their cords backward with an expert jerk each time they came in contact with the wincing flesh. Pain from his tortured wrists was almost equal to the agony of flogging, but as blow succeeded blow the bruised skin yielded to the impact of the ropes, and soon the young man was past feeling, hanging limply on the grating, an inert and bloody thing in which the only sign of life was a convulsive jerking.

"'Twill make him know his betters," said the pirate captain as they cut the bindings from the swooning captive's wrists and dashed a bucketful of water on his raw and bloody back. "Throw him in the lazaret, but mark'ee, have him up on deck betimes tomorrow. We'll larn this fine Virginny gentleman who's master o' this ship."

Thus began young Willoughby's novitiate in hell. When morning dawned and a seaman came to kick him into consciousness, he lay upon his bed of sacks delirious with fever. The ship's physician, a former horse-doctor with a face as long and saturnine as any of his erstwhile patients, mixed a mess of wine and oil and poured it on his mangled back, while a pannikin of sharp, tart wine was forced between his lips, followed in an hour by a pap of biscuit soaked in strong Jamaica rum. The next day he was strong enough to take a little food, and the third day he was set to work swabbing decks, polishing the mountings of the guns, tarring and coiling ropes. Conversation with his shipmates there was none. None spoke to him except to curse his clumsiness at unfamiliar tasks; none answered his attempts at talk save with obscene references to his ancestry or dreadful threats of what he might expect if he failed to please Black Rudolph, as they named the skipper of the ship.

In two weeks' time he had regained some measure of his strength, but the soul-destroying toil, the scanty, swill-like food, and the ceaseless threats and blows

and bullying to which he was subjected had almost crushed the spirit out of him. Bruised face and ribs had taught the wisdom and necessity of dodging nimbly when some member of the crew passed by; experience of daily practise made him quick to sense the presence of a persecutor, even though he failed to hear the impact of bare feet upon the deck. His finely tailored clothes had long since been appropriated by such members of the pirate gang as they would fit, and his whole wardrobe consisted of a pair of cotton drawers tied about the middle with a length of sailcord. He was hound-thin, and the muscles of his arms and legs stood out like ropes against the sun-baked skin; hollows marked his cheeks from eye to jaw; his ribs were numbed by the ridges which they made against his torso; and his unkempt hair and straggling growth of beard, together with the lash-scars on his back, gave him the look of some poor Tom o' Limbo taken after weeks of hiding from the law.

Too tired to dream, the wretched young man lay upon his bed of sacks moaning softly now and then as he felt a twinge of pain in work-cramped limbs, when the pounding of quick steps above woke him from the stupor of exhausted sleep. Though the hour was past four bells and none except the members of the midwatch should have been on deck, he realized the whole crew had responded to some silent call, for there had been no shrilling of the half-caste Pipo's boatswain's pipe. He could hear the rumble of the rollers as the carronades were set, the scraping of the shot-racks and the eager, half-hushed voices of the pirates as they set the boarding-nets in place.

As he crept up the companionway and looked about the deck he saw the hurried preparations carried on. A coxswain scurried up and down behind the guns, scattering mingled sand and sawdust on the decks to render them less slippery when the blood began to flow; there were round-shot pyramided by the carronades, open powder kegs in readiness, stands of arms—muskets, pikes and axes—ready to hand when the grapnels had been cast; and already marksmen, matches glowing in their teeth, were swarming up the ratlines to their posts above the sails, ready to shoot down the steersmen of the ship about to be attacked. The gunner, gold rings glinting in his ears, stalked from carronade to carronade like the priest of some obscene religion visiting his foul altars ere the sacrifice began.

FOLLOWING the avid, wolf-eager glances of the crew, Willoughby descried the quarry. A bright moon rode the heavens, but the sea was swathed in fog which drifted lazily in the light breeze. A league or so away, protruding from the mist like tree-tops from a fleecy undergrowth, reared the swelling topsails of a mighty ship. On she came majestically, holding to a course which in a day or so would bring her off the coast of Hispaniola, the fog which veiled her hull and lower rigging from the pirates making their lower ship entirely invisible to the lookouts at her bow.

Her fore-and-aft rigging enabling her to sail closer to the wind than the square-rigged Spanish vessel could, the pirate craft cut a course which made a widely obtuse angle to that which the Spaniard followed, and, guns in readiness, bore down upon her victim with the stealthy swiftness of a swordfish dashing at a whale.

So swift and silent was the buccaneers' attack that a scant two hundred yards of water rippled between the craft when a startled hail rang from the Spanish ship. *"Quien viva?"* called a lookout; then, as he received no answer: *"Que buque es?* —what ship is that?"

A pandemonium of yells, cat-calls and insults phrased in the obscenities of half a dozen languages responded to the sentry's hail, and the pirate ship swerved sharply in her course, bringing herself broadside to the galleon. Blown lint-stocks dropped on brimming touch-holes, and the pirate's black ship reeled and shuddered like a stricken thing as every carronade upon her starboard side belched orange flame and chain-shot screamed like all the demons out of hell as it winged its way to cut and mangle the tall Spaniard's rigging. The gun crews bent their backs and worked like devils toiling in the glow of their own fires as the sooted tubes were sponged and powder charge and shot were driven home; then a second salvo roared destruction and the black ship changed the angle of her course to swoop down on her quarry.

As they drew alongside, Willoughby discerned the Spaniard's figurehead, the gilded image of a female saint crowned with coronet and halo, proud-breasted under lifted arms, its body bent like a drawn bow to conform to the out-curve of the prow, its sandaled feet resting on an uncoiled serpent. About the slotted gun-ports in an ornate scroll of gilded wood her name appeared, *Santa Catarina de la Sangre Preciosa.*

This much he saw through choking whorls of swirling smoke; then with a jar which threatened every rigging-timber and hull-plank the two ships ground together and there came the clang of metal as the grappling-irons clutched and held, and like rabid dogs the pirates boiled across the rail and hurled themselves upon the Spaniard's deck.

Wild confusion prevailed there. Completely taken by surprize, for the most part only half awake, the Spaniards gathered at the mainmast, hastily adjusting breast- and head-pieces, drawing swords or snatching pikes and muskets as they ran to form a ragged rank about their captain. As the buccaneers swarmed overside the Spaniards rushed to meet them, and there was clash of cutlas against sword and the vicious *pung* of boarding-pikes as they were driven home, mingling with the bellowing roar of pistols and the thud of heavy axes striking iron caps or unprotected bone. The galleon's defenders were no cowards, nor were they any fewer than the pirates, and for a little while it seemed that they might sweep the boarders back, but Black Rudolph knew the strategy of such attacks. Hardly had the first wave of his ruffians, led by Boatswain Pipo, joined the Spaniards in close fighting when a second boarding-party under command of Mate Barnaby swarmed across the railing forward, and with shouts of fury and wild exultation hurled themselves upon the Spaniards' rear.

Beset on both sides and unable to oppose effectual defense at either van or rear, the Spaniards closed their ranks and, fighting stubbornly, fell back on the shelter of the high poop cabin.

"Haul in the midship guns!" Black Rudolph ordered, and though his queer, flat voice was scarcely louder than its usual wont, it carried through the noise of conflict easily, and in quick obedience a dozen of his followers laid hold on the brass culverins, jerked them from their ports and trained them abaft. The maneuver was no novelty with Rudolph's men, apparently. As the brazen guns swung round, the pirates fighting with the Spaniards gave back quickly, leaving an open lane between their ranks down which the culverins were aimed directly at the deck's defenders. Pistols flashed, flame blazed into the brass guns' touch-holes, and a double charge of grape-shot swept the blood-stained deck with a devastating breath of hell. The close-packed group of Spaniards withered in the flaming blast

like dry grass in a fire, and before the few who still survived could form their ranks again the buccaneers were on them, plying ax and cutlas, knife and pike, in a very carnival of slaughter.

WILLOUGHBY turned sick as he saw the carnage, but a stinging blow upon his half-healed shoulders dragged his fascinated eyes away. "Up, you bandy-legged son of a sea-cook," a voice bawled in his ear. "We be packin' th' loot off th' Spainisher; lend a hand, blast ye!" Another torturing slap from the flat of a cutlas emphasized the order, and he staggered toward the rail to take his place in line.

"Women! By th' bright face o' God, here be women!" came a joyful whoop from the companionway leading to the galleon's cabin, and as Willoughby reached the corpse-strewn deck he saw Pipo and half a dozen other pirates herding a little company of females up the narrow stairs. Several were past middle life; one or two were young and pretty; one stood out from the rest like a bright star on a moonless night. She was one of those rare creatures, a *rubia,* or Spanish blond, with honey-colored eyes and hair like fine-drawn gold, brightly lustrous as the tiny wires of the filigree cross which hung about her neck. A comb of carven tortoise-shell, thick-set with brilliants, was in her golden hair; her gown was rustling black brocade; the little satin shoes upon her feet had four-inch heels that flashed with incrustations of white sapphires.

At sight of her, young Willoughby stopped in his tracks, heedless of the prodding blade that urged him to his task, and for a moment he felt as though the sudden sharp acceleration of his heart would stop his breath. In those days as in these, Virginia was noted for the beauty of its women, and the belles of Petersburg and Alexandria were among the fairest in the colony, but none of them compared for one instant with this golden Spanish girl. She was like no mortal woman, but rather like a pictured saint in some superb old missal, or an angel playing truant out of heaven. But the tragic drama following her advent broke the thread of Willoughby's enraptured revery.

*"Carmelita, costosa, niñita mia!"* came a quavering hail, and an aged Spanish gentleman, his tunic soaking with the hemorrhage of the dreadful wound which pierced his chest, staggered to his feet. *"Hija mia*—little daughter——" He tottered toward Black Rudolph, trembling hands outstretched in supplication, and: "I ask no mercy for myself, *Señor,"* he choked, "but she, my daughter—spare her, in God's name. By the memory of your mother——"

"Spare her? But of course," the pirate chief cut in. "She shall be spared, old rack o' bones, that I can promise you. Her pretty feet shall never tread the auction block, at least as long as she can please Black Rudolph!" With a soundless laugh he flung an arm about the girl, crushing her against him, while with his free hand he raised her chin and kissed her on the mouth.

*"Perro y hijo de perro*—dog and son of a dog!" cried the old man, stumbling forward and with his final flash of strength driving a blow full in the pirate's swarthy face.

Black Rudolph put the girl from him, not roughly, but with a kind of slow, deliberate tenderness, and the startlingly red lips beneath his black mustache were parted in a smile that showed a hard, white line of teeth as merciless as those of any wolf. *"Cabrón!"* he mouthed the deadly insult in a flat, metallic voice, and drew a dagger from his girdle. For an instant he stood statue-still, the bright steel glinting in his grasp; then with a speed almost too great for sight to mark,

he flashed the sharp blade forward twice. A man's shrill scream of pain was echoed by the girl's thin shriek of horror as the pirate wiped his knife upon his boot-leg and restored it to its scabbard. Upon the old man's cheeks hung two red, tortured globes. His eye-sockets were empty, and his hands waved feebly, gropingly, before his sightless face.

"To th' sharks wi' him!" Black Rudolph ordered, and turned his back upon his gruesome handiwork to superintend the transfer of the galleon's treasure to the storerooms of his ship.

UNWITTINGLY the pirate promised truthfully when he told the father that his daughter would be spared. When the girl recovered from her faint her eyes were dull, expressionless, lack-luster, her lips drooped flaccidly; she seemed shrunk in upon herself. She made no answer when they spoke to her; she was a shrinking, cringing fool, shuddering from all contact with her fellows. Her madness gave her liberty no other woman ever had upon that ship, for there was no joy in kissing lips as lifeless as the features of a corpse or making overtures to one who understood no word of what was said to her.

She wandered here and there at will, tolerated as a harmless animal might have been, and in her wanderings her path crossed Willoughby's at times. On one or two occasions he saved her from a fall when in her aimless walking she had stumbled over ropes or cleats; once when she crouched beside the rail, weeping softly to herself, he put a piece of sugar-cane, filched from the galley, into her hand, and her vacant face responded with the semblance of a smile as she bit into the sticky, cloyingly sweet stalk. For an hour afterward she followed him about, her great eyes looking pleadingly at him, her little hand outstretched in supplication for a repetition of the treat.

One night the ship lay motionless upon a windless sea, the great moon painting sky and fleeting cloud and lazy-swelling water with a brilliant coat of silver. Willoughby stood musing by the rail, idly noting how a line of phosphorescent fire marked the kerf of swimming fishes, wondering if quick death would come to him if he went overside, or if the pirates would recapture him and deal him death by lingering torment, when he felt a light touch on his shoulder. *"Que pobre!"* breathed a soft voice in his ear as gentle fingers touched the healing rope-scars on his back. "They have beaten you, *mi pobrecito. Porque*—why?"

"You"—Willoughby turned unbelieving eyes upon the girl—"you've regained your——"

*"S-s-sh!"* she cut him short with upraised finger, glancing fearfully across her shoulder; then: "Yes, *caballero,* I have recovered reason; but in madness lies protection. Do not let them know!"

"But you spoke to me——"

"But yes, of course, my poor one; dost not think that I have eyes to see? You are beaten, cuffed and kicked, you have the lash-marks on your back, you wear no weapons. You are not of them; like me you are a prisoner; is it not?"

"Yes," whispered Willoughby, "they ran me down——" Pent-up feelings forced a spate of words from him, and in a whisper he recited his adventures since the night the pirate crushed his fishing-boat to splinters.

She listened, her eyes thoughtful, and occasionally interrupted with a soft *"que terrible!"* or an *"ay di mi!"* as his tale progressed.

When he had finished she took up her story. She was Carmelita de Guevara y Rosales, and her father, Don Pablo, had been lieutenant to the Governor of Puerto

Bello. It was under his command that the *Santa Catarina* had set sail for Spain laden with a mighty treasure for the coffers of his Catholic Majesty. She had been born and reared in the palace where her father ruled with power second only to the Governor's, but now she was a woman grown, the time had come for her to go to Spain, where in a convent at the capital her education could be finished, after which a marriage worthy of her lineage and fortune was to be arranged. "Alas," she finished, "now that I am taken by these wolves of the sea naught remains but death or a life of simulated madness; for once they realize I am sane——" she crossed herself devoutly as she begged for mercy from God's Mother.

Prisoners in the hands of ruthless captors, helpless fools of fate, misfortune drew them to each other as the iron and the lodestone are attracted. A week of stolen assignations, furtive, whispered confidences, the aromatic breezes blowing offshore, the glowing tropic moon and the youthful blood which bounded in their veins composed a formula too potent for resistance. "If things were different, Carmelita," murmured Willoughby, the pounding of his heart almost shutting off his speech, "if only I were free——"

*"Obé carisimo,"* the girl's thick whisper cut across his words, "why must we toy with 'ifs'? Is it not enough that on a trackless ocean our two paths should cross, that——" she stopped and turned her face up in the moonlight, her amber eyes tear-misted, poppy-red lips fallen a little apart as her breath came in quick, labored gasps. In a moment their two mouths were one; then Willoughby was kissing her neck, her ears, the little hollow in her creamy throat where the golden cross was hung. Her soft hands traveled questingly across his breast, firm and hard as polished wood beneath its coat of tan. Her eyelids drooped until her curling lashes veiled the amber of her eyes. *"Carillo, carillito,"* she half gasped, half sobbed. *"Mi corazón, mi novio, yo te amo*—my heart, I love you——"

"Do ye, indeed, ma'am?" Flat, toneless, hardly seeming to hold interest, Black Rudolph's voice broke in upon her fervent declaration. "And would ye like to have him for yer own?"

*"Valgame Dios,"* Carmelita faced the pirate with the fearless pride of love, "though I could have no more than the clasp of his hand, I would prefer it to the whole of any other man upon the earth!"

BLACK RUDOLPH looked at them in moody speculation. "Ye mean that, ma'am?" he asked at length. "Ye'd be satisfied with that in preference to a lusty lover——"

"Yes, yes; a thousand times yes!" she interrupted breathlessly. *"Señor Capitán,* can you not see we love each other? You have taken my father's life, your ship is loaded with his treasure; will you not do this one poor thing for us—give us to each other?"

"Why, if ye really meant what ye just said, I think there's no great cause for argument," the pirate answered softly. "Ye're sure ye wouldn't want to change yer mind?"

"No, no—oh, *Dios mio,* you will do this thing for me? Tell me I may have him for my own——"

"Willingly, ma'am. I'm master o' this ship, an' we're at sea. Stand up before th' mast an' I'll unite ye in th' bonds o' wedlock.

"Pipe all hands, Pipo," he commanded. "We're goin' to have a weddin'—an' another little ceremony—up on deck!"

In the dim light of a sailing-lamp the ceremony was performed, Black Rudolph drawing a gold ring from his own finger

for the bride, since Willoughby, of course, had none.

"An' now I s'pose ye'd like a tirin'-maid to sarve ye, ma'am?" the captain asked as the newly married couple faced him hand in hand.

"If you would be so kind——" the girl began, but stopped abruptly as a grimace of cold fury swept across the pirate's swarthy face.

"Kind, quotha?" answered he. "By th' shinin' face o' God, I'll show ye kindness, ye who thought to make a fool o' me! I've give ye man an' maid to once, or may I go to hell wi' open eyes. 'Twill be a few days 'fore th' present's ready fer ye, but have no fear, me beauty, it's a-comin'.

"Bid Master Shadwell make him ready fer a job o' geldin', Pipo," he turned to the boatswain, then motioned to another man to lead the bride below.

As if they had rehearsed their parts, four members of the crew hustled Willoughby into the forecastle where, a charcoal brazier glowing underneath a pot of seething pitch beside him, and a set of knives and shears laid ready on a bench, old Shadwell, the former horse-doctor who acted as the ship's surgeon, was waiting with a grim smile on his face.

"What's this?" cried Willoughby, struggling in the seamen's grasp. "What mean ye by——" A pike-stave crashed against his head, and he fell unconscious like a pole-axed ox before the butcher.

DIM consciousness came back to Willoughby, consciousness that swam up slowly through a drowning flood of pain. He heard somebody screaming in a high contralto voice, felt a paralyzing surge of pain sweep through his legs and thighs and abdomen, tried to rise, then fell back shuddering in torment. Dimly, while the torture of his suffering made him faint and sick, he realized the female scream of anguish had been his. But why should he scream like a woman? His voice . . . Remembrance of Black Rudolph's order struck him dumb. Realization, more poignant than the agony of pain that racked him, fell upon him with the force of devastation. "Bid Master Shadwell make him ready for a job o' geldin'," Rudolph had commanded. Country-bred, he knew the process by which stallions were made neuters. He had been . . . he was no longer a man.

Had his elbows not been lashed against his sides Willoughby would have torn the dressings from his wounds and bled to death, but his captors had anticipated this, and kept him firmly bound. Moreover, they took pains to keep him sodden with great swigs of rum, which not only rendered him incapable of violent motion, but mercifully provided an anodyne for tortured mind and body. Young, strong and clean-blooded, he was quick to heal, and the rude styptic of hot pitch applied to his raw wounds had effectually forestalled infection. Within a little while his strength returned, and he could stand and walk without assistance.

Then came the very accolade of degradation. They cut the straggling growth of beard from his cheeks and lips and chin, they washed and combed his long, dark hair and piled it high upon his head and set a comb of tortoise-shell in it. They bored his ear-lobes with a white-hot iron and fastened heavy hoops of gold in them; they daubed his lips and cheeks with rouge; finally, they brought a woman's chemise of white cambric, a beruffled scarlet satin petticoat and a gayly striped silk shawl to tie about his waist and hips. These they put on him and with jeers and mimic courtliness conveyed him to the captain's cabin.

"Zounds," swore Black Rudolph when they thrust the crimson-faced mock-woman into his apartment, "did I not know

ye for th' thing ye are, I'd surely fall in love wi' ye, my lass!" Nor was his admiration altogether feigned. Willoughby was slightly under middle height, slender as a reed, with regular, small features and slim, patrician hands and feet. His eyes were large and gentian-blue, and shaded by long lashes. The tan of sunburn had completely left him during illness, and with his painted face and female headdress, his ear-rings and his woman's garb, he appeared to be a more than merely pretty girl.

Black Rudolph's cabin was a faithful mirror of his personal fastidiousness. A deeply cushioned couch ran clear across one side, hanging lamps of beaten silver cast a mellow luminance upon rich Eastern rugs and gilded mirrors, finely executed pictures and exotic hangings woven in Mosul and Shamakha. A great four-poster bed of carved mahogany, with silken sheets and pillows, occupied the center of the room; a chest of ebony, which towered half again a tall man's height, stood against the wall toward which the bedstead faced.

They bound Willoughby against the chest with cotton bandages, trussing wrists and waist and ankles to a pillar so he could not move; they wrapped a band of cotton tight across his lips; last of all they passed a bandage round his brow and tied it fast behind the pillar, so he could not choose but gaze before him, since he was powerless to turn his head to right or left or drop his glance upon the floor. Then they brought Carmelita in.

She was lovely as St. Agnes led before the Roman headsman. A sleeveless robe of shimmering white gauze fell about her loosely from white throat to whiter feet, and through its veiling meshes her sweet body shone as pinkly white as a chaste marble statue with the flush of sunrise shining on it.

"*Dios mio, otra mujer*—another woman?" she faltered at sight of the bound Willoughby.

"Don't be bashful, ma'am," Black Rudolph chuckled. "I promised ye a sarvin' woman, didn't I? Thar she be, an' if ye'll notice closely, ye'll see ye once was married to th' baggage, unlikely as it seems. I'm thinkin' that yer lawful wedded husband will be little use to ye, an' no proper lady has a secret from her maid, so we'll just pretend that we're alone, an'——" He drained a pannikin of rum, wiped his lips upon a lace-edged handkerchief, and tossed the silver noggin over his shoulder. "Come, little one," he ordered with a hiccup; "we've waited long enough fer——" She shrank away from him, her little hands outstretched in supplication, but a linnet in the falcon's clutch was luckier than she. He ripped her gossamer gown away and laid a layer of lecherous, drunken kisses on her shrinking body from her lips to her feet, alternating maudlin, obscene compliments with scurrilous insults and abuse; when she shrank from him in palsied horror, he beat and kicked her as a cruel master might mistreat a dog; then resumed his sottish wooing with redoubled ardor.

Willoughby was forced to watch the tragic drama to its end. The bandage held his head in place, and the only surcease which he found was when he closed his eyes to shut the dreadful vision from his sight, but then some fresh appeal for mercy from his wife would force his fascinated gaze upon the horrid tableau, and though he struggled till the strain brought torture to his partly healed wounds, he was powerless to move a muscle in defense of Carmelita.

When daylight finally crept across the sea the night of torment ended. Willoughby and Carmelita were escorted to the women's quarters and locked in with the other female captives.

THE theologians of the early church were wont to say the only pleasure which the damned in hell could have was railing at the other damned. This dreadful doctrine was made manifest to Willoughby in his new estate, for the captive Spanish women took vindictive pleasure in insulting him. No nasty name in the vocabulary of a language rich in nastiness was too vile for them to call him. Obscene allusion to his lost virility was cast into his teeth at every turn, and criticism of his every act was offered in bewildering variety of filthiness. If he strode across the deck with something of his natural gait they asked him mockingly if he expected to regain his manhood by a simulation of his betters. If, impeded by his feminine attire, he walked with something of a mincing step, the shrill, malicious mockery of their laughter cut him like a lash.

To make his mental torment more acute, he found that he was daily losing such poor vestiges of masculinity as remained in his poor, mutilated body. "I am a man!" he would tell himself vehemently. "They may have hacked and butchered me, but I am still a man." Then to his shame and consternation he would break down and cry, sobbing till it seemed his heart would break with pent-up misery and hopelessness.

A gradual transmutation was in progress physically, too. No fresh beard sprouted in the place of that the pirates had shaved off, and where once a manly stubble had adorned his unshorn face, his cheeks and chin and lips were now feathered with a film of fuzzy down. Already there was a perceptible enlargement of his breast and hips, a tightening of the waist. Unwittingly, indeed, despite a conscious effort to resist it, there came a change in walk and posture, a lighter, shorter step, a tendency to use his hands in typically feminine gestures. "I am a man," the tortured youth would tell himself. "I will not be a woman; I won't—I *won't!*" Then tears would wash the boastful words away and the newly-budding breasts would tremble as bent shoulders shook with sobs.

Madness surely would have been his portion had it not been for Carmelita. "*Mi corazón, mi pobre corazón*—my dearest heart——" she'd murmur as she took the tear-stained cheeks between her soft, pink palms. "Have courage, *cara mia.* It is not hard to be a woman—was not the Blessed Mother one? See, I will guide you, I will help you. Lean on Carmelita, little poor one. Have we not been down to hell together? But of course. You have seen my degradation, let me help you to bear yours."

"But I love you, dear," he faltered. "We were married——"

"Foolish little sweet one," she broke in as she stopped his halting words with kisses. "*Porque no*—why not? You have kissed me as a lover, you have wed me as a husband, now you are my little sister!" And she wrapped her arms about him, laid her soft cheek close to his, and crooning soft caresses, held the sobbing, trembling girl-man close against her till the night was done.

Black Rudolph's ship, the *Vengeance,* cruised the Caribbean for another month, during which she took three prizes. Each time a fight was on Willoughby was huddled with the women in their quarters below decks, and not permitted to come out till Shadwell needed help in bandaging the wounded. By the time the *Vengeance* finally turned her bow toward Port Royal, he was so far feminized that the memory of his manhood days was like the memory of a half-forgotten dream or the hazy recollection of a story heard in early childhood.

A NEW life waited Willoughby ashore. The women captured on the *Santa Catarina*, destined for the slave mart, were left in the old barracoon until the time for auction; the bales of silk, the casks of wine, the gold and silver ornaments and utensils taken by the buccaneers were placed upon display in the market-place, with a guard of two-score ruffians to protect them and the half-caste Pipo to conduct negotiations for their sale. Carmelita and "Joaquina", as Willoughby was now known, were sent upland to Black Rudolph's *hacienda*.

This was a farm of several hundred acres kept in a state of splendid cultivation by a gang of Indian and Negro slaves, some of whom were bought, but most of them were stolen, under the direction of a huge mulatto overseer known ironically as Don Fernando. These occupied a settlement of cabins set apart on the plantation proper. The great house was attended by a half-score mixed-breed slaves, mostly octoroons, and it was here that Willoughby's enslavement started.

No task was too abject for his employment. He fetched and carried, helped as scullery maid about the kitchen, served the meats and poured the wine at meals, washed and scrubbed the marble tiling of the floors.

Once again he owed release to Carmelita. She had accepted her position with a fatalistic calm, and lived with Black Rudolph in conditions almost simulating matrimony. He was inordinately vain, and by judicious flattery she was able to secure whatever she desired enough to beg for.

*"Rodolfo mio,"* she pouted, "you did promise Joaquina should be mine. How can she wait on me when she has other tasks to do? Her hands grow rough with labor and they hurt my tender skin. Give her wholly to me, *mi Rodolfo*."

"Now, Satan bake me on a spit, ye're right!" the pirate answered with a laugh. "I promised ye th' slut, an' yours she is, body an' soul, to do with as ye please."

So Willoughby became a lady's maid and learned the arts of the boudoir as few men ever knew them. He combed and brushed his mistress' shining hair and learned to plait it in smooth coils; he learned to blend the rouge and powder on her face; he helped her to disrobe and dress.

For compensation "Joaquina" had more kisses in a day than most Abigails receive within a lifetime, and, if no one were around to see, the mistress would become the maid and lavish loving care upon her servant. "But no, my little one, my very dearest heart," she said when Willoughby protested, "are we not sisters by adoption? You are new to womanhood, *querida mia*, let me help you. Come, sit here while Carmelita does your hair!" Then she would braid and coil the heavy, dark-brown tresses, pile them high and pin them with a tall-backed comb, and standing off admire her handiwork and clasp her hands and cry, *"Que bonita! Que hermosa!"* and clasp her maid's flushed cheek against her breast while she showered kisses on the upturned lips.

The coarse chemise and gaudy petticoat which were Willoughby's first garb of womanhood were replaced by dresses of fine, stiff brocade and clinging gowns of rustling silk or cool, fresh linen. His feet were shod with silken hose and satin slippers with high red heels and silver buckles. He learned to wear a corset and to find delight in seeing how it shaped his waist and hips and bosom in gracious lines of girlhood.

When he first saw his new finery he fell to weeping with sheer happiness; then, realizing how the girlish gewgaws had delighted him, shed shamefaced tears at recollection of his vanished manhood, but Carmelita's rapturous cooings of ap-

proval as he put each garment on outweighed his self-reproachful grief, and soon the two were twittering with happy girlish laughter as item after item of the fine new wardrobe was held up for admiration.

RUDOLPH had rested at his farm for half a year when news arrived that Spanish treasure ships were setting out from Maracaibo. Improvident, like all their breed, his crew had long since squandered their loot, and were hot to take the sea-trail for fresh plunder. The *Vengeance* was refitted, and with crew augmented by a score of sturdy ruffians with worthless lives to gamble for a chance at booty, set bravely out to sea.

With Rudolph's going, life became a paradise for Willoughby and Carmelita. Together they visited the town marketplace, treading Port Royal's narrow streets in their high-heeled shoes and full skirts of cool muslin with demurely downcast eyes, yet missing nothing of the fascinating sights of this crossroads of the Indies. Or they would lie abed till late and have their breakfast of sweet limes and oranges and bitter, creamless coffee served to them while they lay in state upon the great four-poster with its sheets of fine-spun linen, and the great, high-ceilinged room would ring with happy laughter as they peeled the fruits and thrust the juicy segments in each other's mouths, pausing now and then to lick the sweetly trickling juice from each other's chins or lips or fingers. Later, dressed in airy muslin and wide hats of woven palm-leaves, they would walk about the plantings and refresh the sweating field-slaves with sweet fruit or—in which case they were blessed with frantic thanks—with gifts of silver money.

One day when they were out exploring thus they chanced upon a group of slave huts, and heard the sound of blows and a woman's feeble cries for mercy. Rounding the corner of the shanty they saw Don Fernando, the mulatto overseer, flogging an old woman with his rawhide whip in a perfect ecstasy of savage cruelty. *"Bruja—encantadora—ladrona*—witch, magic-worker, thief!" he snarled, making the cruel, plaited thongs whistle through the air before he brought them down upon the shivering shoulders or impotently upraised arms.

*"Bestio, canibal*—stop!" cried Carmelita.

The overseer understood the status of the women at the great house perfectly. For all their jewelry and gorgeous clothes and the luxury they lived in, they were as much slaves as any of the wretches under his command. Black Rudolph could dispose of them upon the auction block whenever he was minded so to do. Indeed, Fernando had seen more than one fine lady go down to the slave pens when Rudolph had grown tired of her. But he was free. Rudolph might take his life if he displeased him, but never could he take his freedom. *"Puta,"* he spat the deadly insult out through grinning lips, "I alone command here when the master is away. It pleases me to flog this carrion, and by all the holy saints, I will!"

Carmelita turned and lifted up her skirt, drawing from her garter the stiletto which was sheathed there. *"Cabrón,"* she cried, "you dare to name me so? *Por Dios*——"

With a skill that came from long and evil practise the mulatto flicked his whip at her, and the dagger clattered on the gravel at her feet as she shrank back with a little cry of pain. Around her wrist there lay a bracelet of red bruise where the whiplash had encircled the white flesh.

For a scarlet instant Willoughby forgot himself. No longer the poor eunuch, the woman Joaquina who had replaced the man he used to be was lost to sight

and mind behind a curtain of red fury, and with a scream of agony Fernando toppled to the ground, his face a bloody ruin of smashed flesh and broken bones where Willoughby had hurled a ten-pound rock into it.

Then Joaquina came to life again, and with a frightened whimper Willoughby shrank back, hands raised before his eyes to shut from sight the bloody havoc he had wrought.

The beaten slave-wench roused slowly to her knees; then, seeing her tormenter lying helpless, dragged herself across the gravel to the female figures who stood clasped together in each other's arms. *"Merci, Madame; merci, Ma'm'selle!"* she croaked, and bending raised first Willoughby's, then Carmelita's dress hem to her lips. "Maman Cécilie does not forget."

They recognized her, then. She was an aged crone from Martinique who had somehow come into Black Rudolph's clutches, and had been retained because her reputation as a magic-working *obeah* woman held the other slaves in terror, and a word from her would drive them to their tasks with greater energy than all Fernando's bullying. She was of a saddle-yellow color, not like a mulatto, but rather as if the pigment had faded from her skin with age. Old, and bent, almost incredibly wrinkled she was, too, but though deformed and bent and wizened, she still retained a dignity and poise which could not help but make themselves noticed. Her eyes were small and bright and very wise, and seemed to take in everything they saw and to see everything seeable at once. Strangely, despite her uncouth ugliness, neither Willoughby nor Carmelita was frightened of her.

"I—I'm sorry if I hurt the fellow," whimpered Willoughby, "but——"

*"Tiens, Ma'm'selle,"* the aged crone broke in, "but it was your great heart that prompted you. Have no fear, Maman Cécilie does not forget."

"But, if perchance I killed him——"

"Then everyone upon the *hacienda* thanks you from the bottom of his heart."

"But Rudolph——"

*"Aqui de Dios—Rodolfo*—I had forgotten him!" wailed Carmelita. "He will be furious, he will—*ohé,* my little sister dear, he will do unheard-of things to you!"

"Have courage, *Madame,"* the aged slave wench bobbed a trembling curtsy, "you shall be quite safe. Maman Cécilie watches over you."

BLACK RUDOLPH's house was pleasant. Built in the Spanish style, it stood surrounded by a grove of palms, three sides enclosing a tree-shaded garden with sanded walks and a still pool where goldfish played among the roots of star-shaped water lilies. Rose-trees and trailing jessamine matched their perfumes, and the close-clipped grass grew cool and verdant underfoot. Between the trees hung hammocks of bright grass-cloth, and in one of these Willoughby and Carmelita rested on the evening following their adventure with Fernando. The night was sultry, and their daytime garb had been changed for sleeveless gowns of rippling China silk. Their bare feet, shod with sandals of soft leather, made highlights on the grass beneath the hammock as they rocked.

"Courage, *muy querida mia,"* whispered Carmelita as she pressed the other's trembling hand. "What if the yellow dog did die? You did but deal him his deserts. I will manage Rudolph; I shall tell him that the beast attacked us and we killed him to defend our honor. Never fear!"

She tossed her *cigarito* in the grass and picked up a guitar, running her fingers

listlessly across the strings a moment, then began to sing a plaintive melody:

*Pregúntale á las estrellas*
*Si no de noche me ventlovar;*
*Pregúntale si no busco,*
*Para adorarte la soledad . . .*

O ask of the stars above you
If these my tears did not flow all night;
O ask if I do not love you,
Who of you dreamt till dawn was light . . .

"But no, we must not sing of love denied, my sweet," she broke off with a laugh. "We are here together, and alone. Is it not enough? Quick, my castanets; I will dance for you!"

She took the little wooden cymbals in her hands and leaped nimbly from the hammock. With a rattling cachinnation of swift rhythm she began, stamping through the mazes of a mad bolero, losing herself completely in the mesmerizing meter of the dance. Her body shook and trembled with the sharp staccato of the castanets, her hair, unbound, flowed down her shoulders in a golden cataract, or flickered round her like a lambent flame as she whirled and pirouetted; her cheeks were flushed, her eyes star-bright. Then, gasping from exertion, she spun across the short-cropped grass and flung herself into the hammock beside Willoughby.

"Am I not glorious?" she panted as she threw her arms about him and laid her mouth to his. "Am I not truly wonderful, *pequeña mia?* But now"—her manner changed abruptly and her voice sank to a throaty whisper—"now I would be comforted. Take my head upon your breast and smooth my hair and kiss me, Joaquina, little sister of my heart!"

For a little while she lay there like a babe against its mother's bosom, making little fearful whimpering sounds and shuddering occasionally as if with sudden cold. "I have fear, *carisima,*" she murmured almost sleepily as Willoughby stroked her cheeks with tender hands. "I have a premonition one of us will die tonight"—a shiver flickered through her and he felt her glowing flesh grow cold beneath his hand—"if it should be I, *corazonita,* promise you will not forget your little sister——"

*"Pardonnez-moi, M'sieur, Madame,"* came a soft voice from the darkness, and a bent form shambled from the shadows of the rose-hedge and bobbed a curtsy to them, *"pardonnez-moi, mais——"*

*"Santisima Maria,"* Carmelita crossed herself in terror, "the *obeah* woman——"

"Precisely, *belle Madame,"* Cécilie bobbed another awkward curtsy; "I have come to warn you and the *beau M'sieur——"*

*"No caballero no está aqui,"* said Carmelita sharply, "no gentleman is here. This is my sister, Señorita Joaquina——"

*"Pardon, Madame,* we waste the precious time," the old slave interrupted. "Black Rudolph's ship is sighted from the harbor. He will be here before the morning breaks."

*"Retro me, satanas!"* whispered Carmelita. "We are undone! *Ohé, muy hermosita mia,* he will flay you!" Locked in each other's arms, terrified and trembling, they fell into an agonized embrace.

Again the old slave spoke, gently, reassuringly, like one who would soothe frightened children. "Have courage, *mes amis,* Cécilie comes to save you from his wrath. See——" Hobbling back into the shadow, she returned with a great bundle which she dropped before them on the grass. "Clothing for *M'sieur,"* she announced. "He must become a man again."

"A man?" the hot blood mounted to his face. A man was something he could never be, though he had forgotten it when he resigned himself to womanhood. Now:

"A man, *M'sieur,"* she echoed. "See, here is man's attire. *Vite,* put it on. The time is short."

She helped him don the unfamiliar masculine attire, cut the once-hateful earrings and withdrew them from his ears, then with a pair of scissors clipped his flowing hair, leaving it just long enough to hide the ring-holes in his ear-lobes.

Hot tears came to his eyes and a choking sob rose in his throat as he saw the shining dark hair fall beneath the scissors blades, but a subtle change came over Willoughby as he felt the rasp of coarse wool breeches on his legs. In a moment, like the fading of a specter at the rising of the sun, Joaquina whose sweet form and substance had been his so many months was dead, a piteous, forgotten little ghost, without so much as a dead body to call hers.

"*Madame*, your jewels," the slave called Carmelita from the trance of tragic horror which enveloped her as she watched Willoughby turn back into a man, "you will need them to escape."

HOPING to forget herself in action, Carmelita hastened to her room, gathered up her jewelry and bundled it into a shawl. It was the pick of loot from half a hundred treasure argosies; diamonds, rubies, emeralds set in exquisite gold mountings, strands of pearls for which a queen might gladly trade her diadem—she threw them carelessly into the shawl as though they had been bits of broken glass; then, tear-blinded, stumbled down the corridor to join the two who waited in the garden.

Cécilie in the lead, they hurried down a winding trail, came at last upon a strip of beach and found an open boat drawn up upon the sands. They launched it in the surfless sea and Willoughby took up the oars. Some three miles to their left the harbor lights were burning, and across the moon there loomed the black sails of the *Vengeance* as she stood toward the roadstead, beating up against the light breeze blowing offshore.

" 'Twill avail us little," Willoughby lamented, tugging at the sweeps. "They'll mark our flight and follow us, and we do not even ship a sail—this tub will be run down within a day, at most."

"It may be we can hail a ship," Carmelita answered from her station in the stern. "I can pay our passage with the jewels——"

"A ship!" he interrupted bitterly. "What ship could give us safety from Black Rudolph and his gang of cutthroats?" He tugged despairingly against the rising tide, then added somberly: "Ah, well, it is no worse to die at sea than on the land, methinks. The sharks would be more merciful than——"

"*Maria misericordiosa!*" Carmelita's scream of terror cut across his words. "*El tiburón*—the shark!" As if appearing when she called its name, a monster tiger-fish swam leisurely across their bow, its dorsal fin protruding from the cloven tide a full four feet.

"My God!" cold terror clutched his heart as he saw the dreadful thing bear down on them. "It must be full five fathoms long!" Astonishment drowned out his frightened speech, and he gazed in round-eyed fascination as the thing came slowly nearer.

Maman Cécilie stood up in the bow, her skinny arms above her head, weaving a sort of mesmeristic pattern in the air; her high, cracked voice was quavering an incantation. She was calling the great shark to them as a stableman might call a horse!

The monster fish swept close, then dived from sight, and as it disappeared Cécilie seized the clumsy anchor tethered to the boat's blunt bow by a length of rusty chain and heaved it straight into the ocean. "Back, back!" she cried, motioning to Willoughby to move aft to the

stern. "*Le raquin* takes us in his charge —he has our anchor in his mouth."

"*O santisima Maria, Madre de Dios,* guard us from the perils of black witchcraft!" Carmelita prayed, as, with a jerk which threw them from their seats, the heavy boat shot forward through the water, while ahead, like a flaming specter out of blazing hell, the mighty shark's great body glowed in phosphorescent silhouette against the blackness of the sea.

The boat's speed quickened. From their places in the stern sheets Willoughby and Carmelita saw smooth, wing-like jets of water curl upward from before her prow and curl back a full six inches higher than the gunwales. On, on they rushed due northward, while the watchers in the stern looked on in trembling awe, and the old witch-woman stood up in the prow with waving arms, urging on their dreadful steed to greater haste in a high, cracked, shrilling chant.

At last the red sun rose above the eastern sea, and the mad career of the rushing boat slowed down. Cécilie leant across the bow and pulled the anchor-chain aboard, laughing in a high, thin tone, cold and hard as the rattle of the metal links which slid between her fingers to the bottom of the boat. "*Merci,* a thousand thanks, my friend!" she called across the heaving ocean. "Thou hast done kindly by us; keep us in sight and we shall feed thee well before another sun has set!" Fifty yards off their larboard bow a spout of water jetted up as a pair of mighty tail-flukes rose above the surface for an instant, then hit the ocean with a swishing impact, as though they waved an answer to her hail.

"Take up the oars, *M'sieur,*" she ordered as she sank down in the bow. "There is rescue yonder." Following the gesture of her yellow thumb they saw a small ship, schooner-rigged, proceeding in a course which would bring her almost square across their bows in another thirty minutes.

"*Gracias á Dios y todos santos,* we are saved!" cried Carmelita joyfully. Willoughby returned the pressure of her hand, but answered nothing. When Rudolph set out in pursuit they would need all the old witch-wife's *obeah*—and more —to save them.

MASTER JEREMIAH SMALLWOOD, captain of the *Goodly Heritage* out of Salem town, regarded his new passengers across the table in his little chart-room. He was a tall man, spare and bony, and the gravity of his expression was heightened by the sober homespun clothes he wore. Yet, had they not been so stern, his deep-set blue eyes might have been called humorous, and a hint of kindliness, repressed, perhaps, but certainly innate, showed in his wide and firm-lipped mouth.

" 'Twill take us but a few days from our course to set ye down at your Potomac landing," he observed, "and the price ye offer is most fair. I'll undertake to do it——"

"But the pirate," Carmelita interrupted fearfully. "Black Rudolph follows hard upon our trail, *Señor.* If he should overtake us——"

"I'll undertake to get ye home," the Yankee skipper answered with a smile more grim than humorous.

His chance to prove his boast came sooner than he thought. The sun was not more than two hours high next day when, growing higher momentarily on the horizon, there showed the topsail of a ship, and within the hour Willoughby and Carmelita recognized the *Vengeance.*

"*O santisima Madre de Dios*——" Carmelita fell upon her knees and crossed herself, then held her clasped hands up to heaven— "O mother of the motherless, protect us from this peril——"

"Silence, woman!" Skipper Smallwood bade. "What mean ye by this papistry aboard an English Christian's ship? If ye have prayers to say, say 'em in a language pleasing unto God!" Thus, having done his full religious duty, he stalked aft to squint through his perspective-glass and take the measure of the ship which followed in his wake.

Years of warring with the Spaniards had developed Rudolph's technique to routine. "Shoot down their rigging, leave them wallowing for want of steerageway, then rush in close, fling grapnels out and board." Such was his battle-manual.

True to this formula, he let drive with his pivot-gun and sent a chain-shot shrieking toward the *Goodly Heritage* at a distance of three-quarters of a mile. The shot fell short, but the *Vengeance* sailed two feet for every one the *Goodly Heritage* could make.

Skipper Smallwood stood upon his quarterdeck and hummed a snatch of psalm-tune. *"Upon the ungodly shall He rain snares*—double-shot the guns with grape, Mister Henderson—*fire and brimstone*—three points to larboard, Mr. Alvard—*storm and tempest, this shall be their portion to drink*—are the pikes and muskets served out, Mister Henderson?"

Cutlases had been girt on, muskets and boarding-pistols primed and loaded, and a stand of pikes set ready by the rail.

Once more the pirate's heavy gun roared out, and the *Vengeance* bore straight down upon the *Goodly Heritage*. Had it been a high-pooped galleon, manned by a clumsy-sailing crew of Spaniards, Rudolph's strategy would have been successful, but the men who staffed the *Goodly Heritage* were New England sailors, men who drank the salt sea-spume with their mothers' milk and had the bellow of relentless surf on stedfast rocks for lullabies. Steered with consummate skill she offered little target for the pirate's guns, and to Rudolph's great surprize, instead of seeking to run from him, she suddenly fell off, turned her narrow stern against him, keeping just beyond the range of grape-shot, and circled round behind him, thus evading broadside fire and chain-shot from his heavy gun, as well. Before the pirate could swing round to bring his side-guns into play or readjust his pivot-gun, the *Goodly Heritage* swerved sharply, crossed his stern a scant ten yards away, and with a flash as sudden as a summer lightning-stroke let drive a salvo of four guns. Gorged to the very lips with grape-shot, the twelve-pound carronades spat death among the close-packed pirate crew. Those who escaped annihilation were for the most part badly wounded, and the air was rent with groans and cries and shrieks of blasphemy.

"Stand by to board!" Skipper Smallwood's order roared above the pandemonium, and as deftly as a corsair ship the *Goodly Heritage* ran alongside of the *Vengeance*, which, bereft of steersman, wallowed drunkenly.

As the Puritans at Naseby swept the Royalists before them, so did Skipper Smallwood's men sweep down on the demoralized defenders of the *Vengeance*. Point and edge they stabbed and slashed their way along the deck, and more dreadful than an Indian war-whoop came the chanting of their psalm-tune as they hewed and hacked and beat down their opponents' guard, then split their skulls like kindling.

Rabid as a maddened dog, berserk with the recollection of the incurable mutilation Rudolph had inflicted on him, Willoughby charged sword in hand beside the Puritans.

BLACK RUDOLPH stood amidships with the remnant of his crew around him, and his deep-set black eyes glowed with recognition as they fell on Wil-

loughby. "Joaquina, by the shining face of God!" he cried. "Come hither, lass; I'd have a word with thee!"

Long years of training with the foil and saber had made Willoughby the equal of most men in sword-play, for the Munros were traditionally soldiers, and their men were trained to arms, even though their destined work lay in the pulpit or the courtroom. The blades engaged, and a look of almost comic disconcertion spread across the pirate's face as he realized he had met his master in the fence. He tried a feint and slash, commencing with a downward stroke as if to split his adversary's head; then, relying on the raised guard of the other's blade, suddenly swerved his steel in midstroke to cut diagonally downward to the neck. But Willoughby dropped point and shifted guard in time, so that the pirate's rapier ran up the sharply sloping angle of his sword, caught in the side-rings and, at a sharp turn of his wrist, fell clattering to the deck.

Disarmed, Rudolph gave back a step, and his cruel eyes widened and grew glazed with terror as they looked into the bare-boned face of death. He turned and ran, fleeing headlong toward the rail, and paused there with a scream as thin with hopelessness as that which Willoughby had given when he woke to find himself unmanned. Below, its pointed snout awash in the green water, as if it waited for him, lay the giant shark Maman Cécilie had called from the ocean depths two nights before.

"Strike, man! Give me th' steel, i' Christ's name!" Rudolph shrieked.

Willoughby looked overside, saw the waiting monster and withheld his thrust. The time had come to take repayment and the score to settle was a long one. The shrinking, palsied thing perched trembling on the rail had been his captor, his master. He had enslaved him, beaten him, unsexed him, made him stand by helpless while he watched the defloration of his bride.

He lowered his point and laughed hysterically. "No steel for you, Black Rudolph," he announced. "Go ye to hell with open eyes!" Contemptuously he raised his foot and kicked the cringing rascal overboard.

WILLOUGHBY and Carmelita stood together by the rail and watched the sea slide backward from the *Goodly Heritage's* prow. Silence lay across the vaulted purple sky and the slowly heaving slate-black waters. Stars shone in the gauzy veil of cirrus clouds that masked the zenith, bright as dew-drops in a net of spider-web, and a growing pearly luminance spread across the eastern sea. The moon rose slowly from the waters, casting a resplendent avenue of argent to their feet. "See, *caro mio,*" Carmelita bade, "it is the path to Spain."

"To Spain?" he echoed dully. "Would you like to go there, Carmelita? Your father's kinsmen would receive you kindly; you could take life up as you intended before Rudolph captured you. . . ."

She looked at him, hurt wonder in her eyes. "And you?" she asked. "You would let me go?"

He kept his eyes averted. "Of course," he answered in a toneless voice. "I can arrange your passage out of Norfolk; there is no war between our peoples now, and——"

"There can never be a war between our peoples, *novio,*" she interrupted softly.

He looked at her uncomprehendingly. "You mean——"

"Thy people shall be my people and thy God my God, *querido.*"

"O, my dear," he breathed, and his heart beat so that he could hardly speak. "You mean you have it in your heart to

stay with me? You can respect a man who is no man——"

She laid a finger on his lips. "Do you remember what I told Rodolfo that night he caught me in your arms and asked me if I loved you?" she broke in. "Listen, heart of mine, I can repeat the words from memory: 'Though I could have no more than the clasp of his hand, I would prefer it to the whole of any other man upon the earth.' "

She faced him starry-eyed, her arms outstretched. "Guilloberto, *corazonito mio,* if you will have me I am yours *hasta la muerte*—till death do us part, my dear." And she kissed him on the mouth. He caught her to him almost frenziedly, and her golden hair came down and swirled about them, veiling their joined mouths as they kissed and kissed again, then laughed and wept by turns in an ecstasy of sheer delight.

Thus did they plight their troth anew.

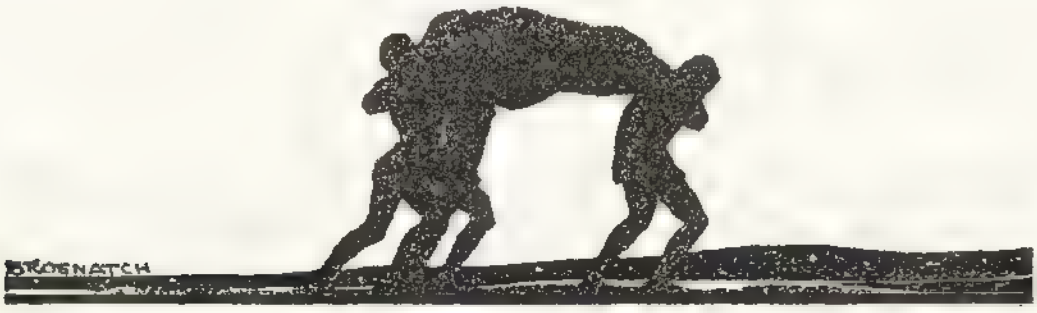
WILLOUGHBY and Carmelita took their place in the community, riding to the hunt, going to the balls in the great houses, entertaining in their turn, sitting in the family pew on Sundays. After service they would walk among the graves, and the neighbors smiled to see the married lovers strolling hand in hand.

But once a month, at least, Carmelita crossed the river into Maryland, visiting the Jesuit mission at St. Mary's City. Far from crying out against the practise, Willoughby indulged her in it. Indeed, had she gone forth to worship at the shrine of Moloch—or the Devil—he would have bade her godspeed when she went, and met her with a kiss when she returned.

WHEN King William waged his war against the French and Indians Willoughby rode out with his battalion of light horse, and for six months was separated from his Carmelita, the first and only separation which they ever suffered from the night they first laid eyes upon each other.

Hastening homeward from the war, he stopped for brief refreshment at St. Mary's City, and while his horse was being fed and curried, stopped to rest in the cool shade of the small cemetery. A cross of marble, white as a pale ghost among the darker granite gravestones, seemed to beckon him, and he crossed the short-clipped turf to kneel before it and decipher its inscription. For a long time he remained kneeling, and when he rose there was a look upon his face such as one might wear if he had seen the wraith of one whom he had loved and lost long since, for the epitaph entreated:

*Ye who passe by*
*Prey for ye goode estate of*
JOAQUINA
*Thrice-beloved sister of Carmelita de Guevara y Rosales*
*Who departed ye life ye 14th day of July,*
*A. D. 1687*



"The sound of the little winds was a gay whistling whisper as they danced."

# Child of the Winds

By EDMOND HAMILTON

*A tender and fascinating story about a strange plateau in Turkistan where the winds from all over Earth converge*

BRENT was drawn by the strong lure of gold to that legended tableland in innermost Turkistan called the Plateau of the Winds. There was an old rumor that lodes of unparalleled richness existed on that unvisited and almost unknown plateau.

Brent knew the place was supposed to lie more than a hundred miles west of the little village Yurgan, so he went to

Yurgan and tried to hire camels and drivers with which to cross the desert. There he learned that it was not going to be easy to reach the plateau.

One man he found, a young Turki named Dasan An, who had traveled just enough as the servant of other white men to make him contemptuous of his fellow-villagers. He affected white-man's clothes, spoke execrable English, and talked to Brent as though they were the only two civilized people in the place.

"Very afraid these ignorant people will not go with us as drivers," he told Brent confidentially. "They too afraid of the Plateau of the Winds."

"What is there there for them to be afraid of?" Brent demanded, and Dasan An smiled in superior fashion.

"They very ignorant people, sir. They afraid of the winds—they say that the Platean of the Winds is the winds' sacred place and that the winds kill all people who try to go there. You see, they think winds are living things, not just air but alive. They say winds not bother men anywhere else but kill any men who go to their sacred plateau, so they not go there."

"Offer them more money," Brent told him irritably. "Tell them I'll give them double pay."

Dasan An held colloquy for a little with his swart-skinned fellows and then turned back to Brent. The cocksure contempt on his face deepened.

"They not go, sir. They say double money no use to a man after the winds kill him."

Brent swore. For a little time he pondered and then he made his resolution and turned back to Dasan An.

"Very well, we'll go without them," he informed him. "We can each ride a camel and lead one, and four camels will carry all the water and supplies we'll need."

"You mean we go just ourselves without anybody else drivers?" asked the Turki, his confidence a little dashed.

"That's what I mean," Brent said, and added, "Why not? You're not afraid of the winds too, are you?"

The Turki laughed noisily. "You are pleased make joke. Dasan An is not ignorant villager like these. I have been servant of white men and have been to Tehran."

"All right; see to getting the camels," Brent told him. "We'll start as soon as the outfit's ready."

That was in two days. In the already brassy glare of the rising sun they rode out of Yurgan with their stalking, sneering camels and pointed due west into the white wastes of salt desert.

FOUR days later the great, horizon-stretching wall of the Plateau of the Winds rose dimly in the distance ahead of them. That night they camped under it, a steep wall of brown rock a thousand feet high, extending north and south for many miles. And that night they heard winds blowing up there on the plateau.

They looked up into the darkness toward the plateau as they heard the distant tumult.

"Winds blowing very strong up there," said Dasan An, and Brent nodded.

"No doubt this plateau is the center of air-currents that meet and form constant winds, and that would explain why your people think it a sacred place where the winds gather."

"Listen to them blowing up there!" he added. "I'm glad we're not up there tonight."

For the winds they heard up on the plateau were strong. Their distant bellowing, shouting tumult came down through the night to Brent like a hubbub of great voices calling to each other,

good-humored, rollicking shouts of jovially brawling wind-giants.

They heard winds of all kinds in that moving uproar high on the plateau: winds that trumpeted and others that wailed and others that shrieked, winds so small that their passage was a whisper and winds so great that they roared; as though winds of all kinds had gathered there and were racing, rollicking, rushing together across the plateau. And as Brent and Dasan An listened they heard over the frolicking wind-voices a different sound. It was a high, silvery whistling, shrill and stabbing and joyous. It was almost the whistle of a screaming wind, yet there was a strange qualitative difference. It rose, fell, rose again and fell again, and as it ceased the wild wind-chorus stormed louder.

They listened until the uproar of winds had receded northward, died out of hearing. Then all was very still.

"Plenty windy up there, all right," Brent repeated, breaking the silence. "I hope it's not that bad tomorrow."

"Maybe better to wait until not so much wind before we try to climb plateau?" Dasan An suggested quickly.

"Nonsense, we're not going to let a little wind hold us back," Brent told him. "The sooner we get up onto the plateau, the better."

"That quite right, quite right," the Turki agreed hastily. "We not ignorant people to be afraid of winds."

Next morning they found a zigzag path up the plateau's side less than a mile from their camp, and started the climb. As they dragged the camels up from ledge to ledge, Brent saw that his companion looked constantly up toward the nearing rim.

It was late afternoon by the time they scaled the last ledge and stood panting on the rim. The Plateau of the Winds lay before them, a brown, barren plain. Miles in toward its center rose two tall pinnacles of rock, but all the rest was level, dusty, bare.

There were no winds blowing where they stood. The only visible sign of winds was a few thousand feet across the plateau where a group of little winds were moving, visible by the sand-whirls they raised from the plain, whisking and scurrying this way and that.

"There ought to be water at those rock-pinnacles," said Brent, gazing against the sun. "We could use it."

But Dasan An was staring at the distant sand-whirls. "See—small winds. Let us hope they not come near."

Brent turned and stared. "What, those little gusts? Why, they couldn't harm us."

"I hope they not come near," the Turki repeated, looking toward them.

"Come on, we'll try to get to those pinnacles before dark," Brent told him.

They started, Dasan An still keeping an eye upon the distant little sand-whirls as he tugged his unwilling lead-camel onward.

Brent was gazing at the rock-pinnacles ahead and wondering what chance they had of finding the legended lodes, even if they located water, when he heard Dasan An cry out suddenly in fear.

"The little winds! They come!"

He turned and saw that in fact the sand-whirls raised by the little winds were now gliding toward them. They looked like little sand-genii as they came on, and it struck him as odd that they should move so in a group. But he frowned when he turned back to his follower.

"Come along, Dasan," he said angrily. "Those winds are not big enough to bother us."

"They come!—they come!" babbled the Turki, almost incoherent with fear.

With a muttered curse Brent started back to shake some sense into him, and just then the little winds reached them. His eyes were filled for a moment with the sand they raised and he had to stop, temporarily blinded. As he stood rubbing his eyes he could feel and hear the little winds blowing all around and through them, whisking and darting about for all the world as though examining the party.

Then suddenly the little winds changed. The little whispering sounds they made became suddenly louder, angry. They pushed men and camels toward the plateau's rim!

Brent called through the flying sand of the miniature tempest for Dasan An to hold his camels. It was all they could do to hold the animals as the raging little gusts strove vainly to push them back.

The miniature wind-storm stopped as suddenly as it had begun. The little winds turned and raced back across the plateau toward the rock-pinnacles, a group of sand-whirls swiftly gliding.

Dasan An emitted a quavering, broken cry. "They have seen us! They have seen we are on the plateau and have gone to summon the great winds to come and kill us!"

"Great winds, nonsense!" Brent told him. "It was just a little flurry of gusts and now it's gone. Do you mean to tell me you're as superstitious as the villagers?"

But this appeal to Dasan An's vanity was in vain, for all his superior skepticism was gone in the panic that now filled him.

"It is not superstition—the winds *are* living, though I denied it!" he wailed. "They have seen us and know now we are here and unless we go back we shall die."

"Forget that stuff and get the packs fixed on those camels of yours," Brent ordered authoritatively. "Then we'll get going again and——"

He stopped. For he was looking at Dasan An's face and as he spoke he saw it changing terribly. It became a swart mask of frozen fear, naked and awful. His eyes bulged with terror as he stared west.

Brent turned and looked, and felt a chill close round his heart. The whole western heavens had grown suddenly dark with clouds of sand lifted by great winds. A rapidly rising moaning filled the air.

He dropped his camel-ropes and leaped toward a near-by depression in the rocks, yelling to Dasan An.

"Get into here with me!" he yelled. "We can't hold the camels—let them go!"

"The winds!" he heard the Turki cry thinly. "The great winds come!"

Then as Brent threw himself into that little hollow he heard no more for the terrific roar of the advancing winds. He saw the camels bolt madly, squealing in terror. He saw Dasan An, staring at the oncoming sand-clouds like a man fascinated by the face of death, prostrate himself like a worshipper. Then to Brent it was as though hell had been suddenly dumped upon them, a hell of wind instead of flame. He lost almost all power to distinguish sensations as the great winds thundered down on them.

He saw Dasan An picked up by the winds and whirled down onto the rock plain. And again the winds lifted and smashed the Turki downward, and again, till his body was mere red pulp.

He glimpsed the camels grasped by the mighty winds and brushed off the rim of the plateau. Then he felt the winds tearing at his own body and heard in his ears their terrible bellowing. It was a thunder of titanic rage, a wrathfulness beyond anything human, a colossal anger bent on rooting him out and beating him into a pulp.

Clawed by those awful winds, Brent

clung insensately to his little shelter, digging his fingers into the rock. He felt himself being pulled forth, and the mad bellowing was louder. The winds plucked him farther out of his shelter. He heard over their thunder a shrill, stabbing whistling as he was torn completely loose. The winds started to lift him bodily into the air.

He heard in that second the silver whistling stab swiftly, urgently. The winds dropped him again upon the rock.

Half-conscious only, Brent raised his head to see that the great winds' sand-clouds had withdrawn a little from him. Running toward him through the wild winds was a girl. A girl from whom came the silver whistling! A slim, bronzed girl clad in a flying white garment, bronzed legs and arms bare, her dull-gold hair flying backward like flame as she ran.

She was running toward him through the winds with a swiftness that made her seem a thing of air herself. He saw a face dynamically beautiful, gray-green eyes wide with emotion, fixed on himself. He heard the unearthly whistling stab again from this girl's lips and thought he heard the thunder of winds lessen still further. Then he heard and saw nothing as unconsciousness claimed him.

BRENT had no immediate memory of what had happened, when he awoke. He knew only that he lay in darkness on something soft and warm. He tried to remember where he was, and rapidly did remember. He remembered the climb onto the plateau, the winds that had battered Dasan An to death, that had seemed about to kill him also when they had suddenly lessened.

And just as the winds had lessened a girl had appeared, a girl with gray-green eyes who whistled silver-shrilly! Had that girl been real? And where was he now?

Brent sat up, and discovered he had been lying on some soft skin rugs. He looked about him in the dark.

Gradually he made out that he was in a rocky chamber or natural cavern of considerable size. Fruits of different kinds and flowers and skins lay about, and a spring gleamed in the corner. At one end of the cavern a round aperture opened on a sky of thick stars.

Bewildered, he got to his feet and walked out of that opening. Out there in the starlight he saw that the cavern in which he had lain was in a towering pinnacle of weathered rock, and that another pinnacle was close by. But how had he come to these pinnacles?

Before him in the dim starlight stretched a ghost-like plain, the Plateau of the Winds. Out there not a hundred yards from him moved a slender figure in a brief white garment, running, darting, dancing—the girl he had seen as consciousness left him.

The girl was yet unaware of him. She was running and darting to and fro with incredible swiftness. And a half-dozen little winds were blowing around her, whisking little sand-whirls to the eye. Dart and twist as she might, the sand-whirls darted more swiftly after her. The sound of the little winds was a gay whistling whisper as they danced. And from the girl's lips came joyous whistling.

Suddenly she saw Brent. She stopped dead, looking toward him, then came slowly to him. He saw again in the starlight that dynamic beauty of her face. Her eyes looked into his, intently. They were wide eyes, clean and clear as wind-washed skies, clear beyond anything he had ever seen on earth, and in them flickering a wild pulse of freedom.

Around both him and the girl now whirled and whisked the little winds, the dancing sand-whirls. Brent felt them tugging at his coat, exploring his garments,

ruffling his hair, like mischievous children darting around two adults.

He stared at the girl, and then his amazement forced him into speech.

"By heaven, you're white!" he exclaimed. "Whatever you're doing here or however you got here, you're a white girl!"

The girl listened fascinatedly, on her face an oddly eager remembering expression. When she spoke, her voice had in it the high, silvery quality of that stabbing whistling.

"Girl?" she repeated, tentatively. Then she pointed a finger at her own breast. "Girl—Lora," she said.

"Your name's Lora?" Brent cried. "Then you must be English. I'm Brent —Dick Brent."

"Brent?" she repeated. Her clear brow was wrinkled in thought, her eyes shining with troubled excitement. "English?"

He caught her arm. He forgot all else in his excitement at finding this white girl on this lonely, unvisited plateau. How had she come here and how long had she stayed here? How had she lived here?

To Brent's rapid, excited questions she answered first only with a puzzled frown. Suddenly speech spilled hesitantly, jerkily from her in that sweet, high voice.

"Almost—I had forgotten—to talk!" she told him. "Until you came I had forgotten—men—people——"

"Forgotten them?" Brent said. "Then how long have you lived here alone?"

"Since—since——" Words seemed lacking to her and she held her hand waist-high from the ground. "Since I was so."

"You mean you've been here since you were a little girl?" Brent said incredulously.

Her head bobbed. She seemed struggling for long-forgotten words with which to express herself.

"My father and other men came here long ago, and I was with them. They hunted something. Gold? I do not know now."

"But what happened to your father and the others?" Brent wanted to know.

Her answer was simple, matter of fact. "The winds killed them. The winds have told me that they have killed many men who tried to come here."

Brent stared at her, staggered by her words. Yet strangely, too, something in him had expected those words, had sensed a strangeness in this girl that made her words seem ordinary coming from her, even though what she said was impossibly fantastic.

"The winds told you?" he said. "You talk as though the winds are living things."

Lora's eyes widened in wonder. "But of course they are," she said, staring at him in surprize.

Brent's denial was forceful. "That's nonsense! Winds are not living—they're just air!"

"Of course they are, but they are living air," Lora told him. "They move in the unliving air just as we living people move on the unliving earth, and like us some of them are great and some small, some strong and some weak. Their life is not our kind of life, but they are living and they know things. Do you think if they were not living they would answer me when I call them like this?"

Lora pursed her lips suddenly, and silver whistling notes stabbed up into the darkness from her tilted face. Then down from the upper night smote winds, loud, wild, trumpeting their strength. They seemed to circle the girl, blow round her and tug and push her and roar about her. The whisking little winds scattered as these strong gusts smote and whirled. A tumult of noisy winds whirled round the girl where a moment before had been

almost a calm. Brent heard Lora laugh into the shouting gusts, heard her whistling stab again, and saw the strong winds whip away and upward as suddenly as they had come.

"Now do you believe that the winds are living?" she cried with a silvery laugh.

"Of course I don't believe it," Brent told her. "That was just a little windflurry such as must be common here all the time. It hardly proves that the winds are anything but winds."

Lora stamped her foot angrily. "It is not so! I will call them again and show you——"

But Brent caught her arm as she raised her face. "No, don't—I'll believe they're living if you want me to. I'm not interested in the winds, but in you. How have you lived up here a dozen years or more on this barren plateau? How was it possible for you to live as a child, if your father and the others were killed?"

The girl's anger fled as quickly as it had come, and she took Brent's hand, led him into the dim cavern. She pointed to the soft skins, the fruits and the dark-gleaming spring in the cavern's corner.

"It is simple. I sleep on those, and there is what I eat and drink."

"But where can you get fresh fruits here?" Brent asked incredulously.

"I don't get them—the winds bring them to me, all I need," she answered simply.

Brent stared, and her nostrils quivered again in sudden anger. "You do not believe!"

"Of course I believe you," Brent said hastily. "After all, winds do pick up things of all kinds and carry them long distances. But how comes it that you were left living when your father and the others were killed?"

Before answering, Lora took his hand in her own soft little hand and drew him down to sit by her side on the skins. Her face was intent, in the dim light from the opening, and a little frown was on her forehead. Brent watched her fascinatedly, the only sound the distant, ceaseless murmur of the winds.

Her voice was slow, still struggling for words. "Not much can I remember now of that time," she said. "My father and another white man I remember, and dark men that led big animals, on one of which I rode. And I remember the hard climb up onto this plateau. Then the great winds, coming across the plateau in their wrath and smiting all of us. I remember my father and the other men being hurled over the plateau's edge by the winds. I remember the cries of the falling men and the roaring of the winds.

"The winds picked me up too, lifted me into the air. But they did not kill me at once, perhaps because I was so small. They played with me! They tossed me through the air from one wind to another! They shouted with laughter, their anger forgotten, as they played with me. Then one wind took me from the others, a wind that was different from the rest. It was strong but was gentler, softer. It took me here to the rock-pinnacles and set me down. I cried for a long while and then slept, and when I woke that different wind was there again.

"It petted me, caressed me, touched and reassured me, so that I forgot my grief. It left, and after a time it came back with fruits and tanned skins and other things it put down before me. I knew it from all the other winds and I thought of it as the mother-wind, because it cared for me.

"I talked to the mother-wind and I thought it heard me. I was not afraid any longer, for I knew the winds would not hurt me. The other great winds came and picked me up and would have played

with me again, but the mother-wind took me from them and would not let them have me.

"In time the winds all came to know me and to be accustomed to me. They brought me food and fruits and things they picked up in distant places where men lived. I came to know one wind from another, and to know the great and mighty winds and the smaller, weaker ones, and the little winds that were smallest of all.

"I listened to the sounds the winds made to one another and to me, and I learned to whistle sounds much like those, to speak to them. And though they could not hear as we hear, I knew somehow that they sensed my whistling, and answered it, and so I became able to talk with them.

"And winds from over all the earth have talked to me, and I to them. For somehow this plateau is a gathering-spot of all the winds, and from all over earth they come here and go again, coming and going high above the earth where men can not know of them. Here they mix and meet and play, and here I have talked with winds from all the world.

"But many of the great winds stay here almost all the time, and among them is the mother-wind. Never since I came here has the mother-wind gone for long. It is the mother-wind that I love best of all the winds, yet all of them I love."

BRENT had listened, rapt in a fascination beyond reason, but now he was forced to voice his incredulity as Lora stopped.

"But girl, this is fantastic, impossible! Winds are not living—you have lived so long with only the winds for company that you have come to think them so. How could a wind talk or hear? How could a wind speak to you and understand you?"

Lora shook her head. "That I do not know, but they do speak and they do hear. They understand my whistling and I understand their sounds. All things I ask they will do for me, or bring to me. Did I not stop them from killing you when they were about to slay you as they did your companion and your animals?"

Brent stared at her. "You mean that you think that wind-storm stopped because you told the winds to stop?"

Lora nodded. "Of course. When I saw you I whistled for them to let you go, and they did so, though they were very unwilling, still wrathful with you. They helped me bring you here to the pinnacles, though they did not want to do that either."

He shook his head. "I can understand your believing all this," he said, half to himself. "No doubt there are always winds up on this high plateau, and no doubt it was a freak of currents that saved you when the winds annihilated your father's party. It's natural enough you should personify the winds that have been your only companions here, too, and fancy that you could talk to them and they to you. But when it comes to telling me that——"

Brent broke off suddenly, aware of an abrupt weakness. He swayed a little and Lora darted quickly to her feet.

"But you are still tired, weak," she said. "I had forgotten that you must be so."

She took some of the tanned skins and made a soft little couch across the cavern from her own.

"Sleep now," she said simply, and when Brent lay down, she lay down as simply upon her own skin-couch.

Weak and sore from the battering of the winds, Brent drifted almost at once into sleep, the distant wind-voices outside in his ears. He woke the next morning to find the cavern gold-bright with sun-

light slanting through the opening, and wondered where he was until he heard outside a gay, silvery whistling. He sprang instantly to his feet and went outside, to find Lora standing whistling near by.

She saw him emerge and cried, "Brent, she has come to me already this morning! The mother-wind!"

"What?" said Brent incredulously.

"See, it is she!" Lora exclaimed, her face bright with happiness. "I have been telling her about you——"

Brent saw that a wind was in fact blowing around the girl, gently ruffling her hair, the sound of it a soft, crooning note.

Lora whistled briefly, the silver-shrill notes tumbling over one another. The wind paused in its caressing of her and moved toward Brent.

Brent felt unreasoning panic as that wind touched him. He wanted to run but told himself it was only a wind, only a moving mass of air. He stood there while it touched him softly, as though examining him, investigating him.

Then its touch changed and was no longer investigatory but caressing. He felt its touch against his cheek like the airiest of airy fingers, warm breath on his hair like that of a loving parent. Its strong, crooning note in his ears was infinitely reassuring, calming. His heart expanded in strange warmth.

That warm, strong wind circled him and Lora for a few moments longer, then with a final ruffling of the girl's hair left them. Brent saw it moving westward across the plain, raising the dust a little. He felt strangely content, like a child that has been petted, pacified.

"She liked you, Brent!" Lora was saying. "I could tell that the mother-wind liked you."

Brent told himself that he would have to fall in with the girl's strange fancy. It would do no harm.

"I'm glad she did," he said. And he *did* feel glad, though he told himself it was wholly an unreasoning gladness.

"Always the mother-wind stays near the plateau, near me," Lora confided as they walked across the rock plain. "Many other winds stay here too, but most come and go from the far places. Even little ones like those."

She pointed as she spoke toward a chaotic little group of small sand-whirls dancing about not far away. As she pointed, the little wind-whirls changed direction, suddenly glided toward the girl and the man; came, Brent told himself, like children who had suddenly sighted a beloved person.

The girl laughed, threw out her arms as though welcoming the little winds. They whisked and whirled merrily, gleefully, around girl and man, combating, conflicting, a flurry of quick gusts.

It was senseless, Brent told himself, to let himself be affected by the girl's fancies. Yet he found himself against his reason thinking of these little winds as living, playing, even as she did.

SWIFTLY as they had come, the little winds whipped away, chasing one another across the plain.

Lora laughed. "They are but very small winds, those, yet I love them almost the most."

Brent asked, "Lora, have you never wanted to leave this plateau? To find other people?"

She turned the clear gaze of her gray-green eyes on him. "Why should I want people when I have the winds?"

"But surely you don't want to live here on this plateau always, even with the winds?"

She shook her head as though explain-

ing something obvious. "But I couldn't leave the winds!"

Her soft, bronzed arms suddenly circled Brent's neck and she looked up into his face like a pleading, affectionate child.

"I want to stay here, and now that you have come I want you to stay here with me. You will, Brent?"

Brent's arms tightened involuntarily around her and he drew a long breath as he answered.

"I'll stay," he said, "for a little while, at least."

Brent stayed. He told himself that it was but for a short time, that in a few days he would cure the girl of her fancies about the winds and that she would leave with him. But he could not change Lora's ideas regarding the winds. And Brent, against his will, against every conscious thought of his reason, found himself insensibly coming to share her viewpoint.

He found himself thinking of the winds as living things, and not just moving air. He found himself distinguishing one wind from another, just as he might one person from another. The great, strong winds that boomed solemn and majestic, the smaller, wilder winds that roared in and away, the little winds that whisked and played on the plateau—he could not keep from thinking of them as one might think of living people.

And there was that strong, gentle wind that Lora called the mother-wind. Every morning when he and Lora emerged from the cavern the mother-wind was there to greet and touch them. And every morning they found there fruits and things that Lora said the winds had brought.

Brent's reason told him that it was not impossible in this high place of strange wind-currents for freak currents constantly to bring objects a long distance and drop them. But reason alone could not combat the strange influence that the girl's belief had upon Brent.

From early morning until late night there were always winds about Lora, it seemed, even more than elsewhere on that plateau of winds. Whether or not they were living as she believed, the girl truly lived with the winds as companions, Brent saw.

And soon it seemed to him that no companions could be more wonderful, more swift and beautiful, than these that blew round all the round world, that roared and whistled and sang with life infinitely above the life of all poor things that grubbed on earth.

They were companions that could be wilder than any else in the world, as when they thundered across the plateau in tremendous wind-charges, Brent and Lora running with them and the girl's sweet whistling stabbing.

They could be playful, as when the strong gusts darted and jerked around the laughing two until they ran to the cavern for shelter. But only the mother-wind among them could be tender with that warm tenderness Brent felt each time that wind blew round him.

To Brent the world he had left came to seem unreal, and he had almost forgotten the quest that had brought him to the plateau. All that was real to him now was Lora and the plateau and the companioning winds. All, until one night sudden awakening came to Brent.

THAT night when he and Lora entered the cavern something made him take her suddenly into his arms and kiss her. She resisted for a moment, then suddenly returned his kiss. Brent's face was set with abrupt resolve when they separated.

"Lora, we're going to leave here!" he exclaimed. "I love you and we're going back together to the world, our world."

Lora's eyes were shining, but troubled. "But the winds?"

"You'll leave them for me, now?" Brent pressed her.

She hesitated. Brent heard the bursting uproar of rollicking winds outside and held his breath. Then she came closer into his arms.

"Brent, I'll go with you!" she cried. "Wherever you wish!"

But a few moments later the trouble came again into her clear face.

"But the winds," she repeated. "I am afraid, somehow, that they will not let me go."

Brent laughed. He had shaken off the influence of the plateau completely, now.

"After all, they're only winds," he said, and then added to reassure her, "Why should they stop you when you say they love you?"

She said slowly, "That is why I fear that they will not wish to let me go."

Brent busied himself in making skin bottles to hold water and fruit. Two mornings later he and Lora started.

Before they left the pinnacles the wind she called the mother-wind blew round her for minutes while she whistled.

Her clear eyes were near to tears as she turned to Brent. "I was telling the mother-wind—good-bye," she said.

"Tell her good-bye for me, too," said Brent, laughing, and seriously Lora whistled quick silvery notes.

The strong, soft wind touched Brent, blew over him, and at that airy, loving touch he felt suddenly a little ashamed of his flippancy.

He and Lora started eastward across the plateau. Little winds frisked and played around them, and now and then some of the greater winds came down from the upper air to whirl around them. But not now did Lora whistle greetings to any of them.

But when they neared the plateau's rim, the winds changed. Their sounds had now a puzzled, anxious note, it seemed to Brent's slightly strained nerves. He told himself it was well they were getting away from a place that so easily bred such fancies.

The winds began to push them back from the rim with increasing force as they neared it. Lora turned a white face to Brent.

"They do not want me to go farther, Brent," she said.

He took her hand in his. "We're not going to stop just for winds," he said. "Come on."

But the winds now were blowing them back more and more strongly from the plateau's rim. And more winds seemed gathering, their voices becoming a shouting tumult.

Though Brent and Lora bent their heads and pushed forward with all their strength, the winds forced them back, not violently but strongly, determinedly. Their tumult grew angrier.

"Brent, it is as I said, they will not let me go!" cried Lora over the wind-roar. "If we go farther they will kill you for taking me!"

"It's just freak winds—there are always strange winds at the edge of a height like this!" he shouted back.

"We must go back—before they kill you!" she repeated, clinging to him, her face taut with concern.

Brent slowly assented. "All right, we'll go back for this time."

THEY started back toward the pinnacles. Slowly the winds' angry tumult subsided around them.

Again they whirled playfully around the girl, but Lora did not heed them. And her face still was white when she and he reached the cavern.

"They would have killed you for trying to take me away, Brent!" she said. "We dare not try again."

"We'll try again," said Brent, his chin

setting hard. "A bunch of winds can't scare me."

But when he saw the girl's face he added quickly, "We'll try it when it's not so windy there by the rim."

Her face became thoughtful. "If we went at night when the winds are playing elsewhere on the plateau, they would not see us go."

Brent reflected. "It certainly should be less windy there at night," he said, to himself. Then he added quickly to Lora, "We'll try it tonight!"

That night they waited in the cavern after darkness fell, and did not go out, though they heard the winds moving and shouting all around the rock-pinnacles. At last they heard the great wind-tumult move off across the plateau.

They went out then, and found all still outside. In trumpeting, frolicking tumult the winds were receding northward, the sound of them coming back dimly. Brent and Lora at once started eastward across the plateau.

They met no wind now as they crossed it. The distant wind-uproar they still heard as they started down the plateau's side, but when they reached the desert plain below and headed east, it faded.

Morning found them many miles from the plateau, which had dwindled to a thin brown line on the horizon behind them. All around them stretched the white wastes of the salt desert, flat and dead.

"No winds bothering us now!" Brent said. "I knew we'd be all right once we got off that wind-swept plateau."

Lora looked back. "I fear that they will follow when they miss us," she said. "And they can follow swiftly!"

Brent shook his head. "They're only winds. Now that you're away from that plateau you'll come to see that."

She said nothing, but he marked that ever and again she turned to look back as they forged east that day.

That afternoon she uttered a little cry and pointed back to where great clouds of sand moved on the desert, like towering genii of the wastes.

"They have followed, Brent!" she cried. "They search for us!"

Brent looked, and felt a strange chill; yet he kept his voice steady. "It's only some sand-clouds, Lora. We must keep on going."

They went on, but now Brent too turned each few minutes to look back at those monstrous clouds of blown sand that moved here and there across the desert behind them.

The sand-clouds seemed searching all the desert as they advanced, indeed; yet even so they came closer and closer to the hastening pair. There were scores of those towering sand-giants, scores of great winds advancing across the desert.

Soon they could hear the distant roaring of those mighty winds. And then Lora stopped.

"Brent, we must hide!" she cried. "It is our only chance—to find some place of hiding until the great winds are gone."

"But it's senseless to hide from winds," he exclaimed. "They're not hunting us—it's only your fancy."

"I know they hunt us and that they will kill you if they find us," she said swiftly. "We must——"

She stopped suddenly, uttered a little despairing cry and pointed.

"It is too late! They have found us!"

She was pointing at a little whirl of lifted sand moving over the desert close beside them, nearing them.

That little wind stopped, whirled round as though in maddest excitement, then darted back toward the distant huge sand-genii.

"They have found us!" Lora repeated. "Brent, I want to die too if you are killed!"

"We're neither of us going to be killed!" Brent told her. "Come on."

They hastened forward, running now. The distant wind-roar behind them became louder, louder, yet they did not look back. Their feet slipped in the sand as they ran. Louder still swelled the bellowing roar, and now the desert about them seemed darkened swiftly.

LORA fell, and Brent stooped to help her up.

"It is useless!" she sobbed over the oncoming thunder. "We can not outrun them. They come, Brent! But if you die I die also!"

With one arm around the girl, Brent stared westward like a pigmy fascinated by giants about to destroy him. Across the desert toward them thundered a colossal host of winds, mighty sand-clouds from which came an ear-dazing bellowing, wrathful, raging. There were scores of them, and there were many scores of smaller sand-clouds, great winds and small, charging down together on the two tiny humans.

Lora broke suddenly from Brent's arm and ran forward toward the charging wind-host, whistling wildly, frantically. The winds picked her up and whirled her aside like a toy, setting her down far to the right, holding her safe there.

Brent saw and knew one instant's thankfulness that the girl was safe. Then the raging winds reached him.

He felt himself whirled high, high, into the air as though by colossal hands. In his ears was a thunderous bellowing of stupendous, elemental anger, and over it he heard Lora's distant scream.

He was poised high for an instant, then whirled down with awful force toward the hard desert. He closed his eyes before the annihilating shock.

There was no shock! Out of the grasp of the thundering winds that held him he was suddenly snatched and whirled aside by another wind—a strong, warm wind that set Brent down beside Lora, then held man and girl as they clung together—a wind that he recognized, the wind that Lora had called the mother-wind!

Came a terrific roaring from the other winds, a heart-checking outburst of wild wind-fury. They charged thunderously forward, sought to tear Brent and Lora from the grasp of the mother-wind.

It seemed an inferno of raging gusts, a hell of cyclonic attack, but still that strong, soft wind held firmly man and girl. A wild conflict of combating winds. But soon that conflict subsided. The great winds' raging died, their thunder lessened. They began to move away, blowing toward the west.

And as they blew, their strong wind-voices were loud, but not in wrath now. It seemed that they uttered a great chorus of sorrow. A mighty sadness of farewell.

Still around Brent and Lora moved one wind, strong, soft, warm, touching them as they clung together, caressing them. They felt that light touch as of airy fingers on their cheeks, soft loving stroking of their hair, soft crooning in their ears. Then that wind too was gone and all was still.

Lora pressed against Brent, her arm around his neck. "It was the mother-wind, Brent! She saved you for me—she saved you from the others and made them let us go!"

Brent's dazed mind, with a great effort, caught at the commonplace world of everyday. "It was the craziest and most freakish wind-storm I've ever seen," he said. "Come on, Lora, I think we'll make it all right now to Yurgan."

Brent got with Lora to Yurgan all right, and to the world beyond. And now that he and she are once more part of that world, that time up on the Plateau of the Winds seems to him almost some strange dream. It seems impossible now that even for a moment he should have allowed himself to fancy that the winds could be living things.

Yet even now Brent is not quite certain in his own mind. For Lora still is very sure that the winds live, and not all his rational explanations can shake what she believes. And Brent himself, remembering some things, must wonder.

Of one thing he is sure, that wherever he and his wife go there seem more winds than anywhere else. And he does not like that. He does not like to see the winds that seem to gather round her, even though to please him she no more whistles wildly to them, and even though he tells himself that it is only fancy.

Neither does Brent like to awake at night and find Lora awake beside him, listening to winds rattling the shutters and sighing in the trees and wailing pleadingly outside the windows, as though entreating her to return, luring her with trumpeted promises of the old tameless freedom. For though Brent tells himself that winds are only winds, he is still afraid that some night she will answer that call.

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# Bride of Baal

By EDGAR DANIEL KRAMER

They have left me alone in the stillness where the cold, grim shadows start,
And there is no sound in the silence save the wild, mad beat of my heart;
They have sealed up the doors of the temple and Beauty is glorified,
For here in the gloom great Baal is holding his virgin bride.

Anointed with oils and perfumes and clad in the night of my hair,
I tremble here in the shadows alone with my black despair;
Cold are the arms that hold me and ever I softly weep
For a lad in a fragrant valley and a trysting I cannot keep.

My body is whiter than snow is, and redder than blood is my mouth;
My breasts are as soft as the breezes from the lotus groves of the south;
My hands are the white rose petals that fall in the time of dew,
But hunger and thirst are my portion, and gone is the joy I knew.

The hours are all unending, as I harken each smothered howl
That lifts to me from the blackness, where the hungry lions prowl;
They have left me alone in the darkness, where the lions have been unleashed,
And I weep in the arms of Baal—in terror of God and Beast!

# The Horror Undying

By MANLY WADE WELLMAN

*A grim and gruesome tale of a strange appetite—the story of a grisly horror*

THE sheaf of papers—I had found it under the ancient flooring that I pulled up to make a fire—intrigued me at once. The cabin offered shelter, the blaze warmth, and now I had found entertainment. I could forget the night outside, and the blizzard and this chill forest in which I had lost myself. I could forget, too, the disquieting man with the beard and the shabby clothes who had stopped me at the edge of the trees before I began my walk, mumbling something about "haunted places." A foreigner, evidently, who smelled abominably of garlic.

Sitting on a broken stool before the fireplace, I spread the ragged, faded sheets upon my knee.

The largest item was a paper-backed book or pamphlet, of the size of an old-fashioned dime novel. In my fancy I can see, now as then, the limp, discolored cover, tinted red by the flickering firelight, and the lengthy title in uneven, ornate capitals:

A TRUE STORY
OF
THE REVOLTING AND BLOODY CRIMES OF
SERGEANT I. STANLAS, U. S. A.,
HIS COURT-MARTIAL AND EXECUTION

Below this promising indication of excitement within, there was a boldly executed woodcut of a full-length human figure. I held it close to the flames for a clearer view.

The dress, I saw at once, was the American cavalry uniform of the middle Nineteenth Century—shiny boots with spurs, stripe-sided pantaloons, a brief dragoon jacket and a round, vizored cap. Three chevrons upon the sleeve stamped the man as a sergeant, and even as I noted this my eye caught more and smaller words beneath the picture: *Sergeant Stanlas, from a drawing by the Author,* and under this the information: *Privately printed, 1848; price ten cents.*

"Ten cents!" Was it a dime novel after all, a dime novel of especially thrilling content? Remembering such shockers as *The Feast of Blood, The Demon Barber of Fleet Street, The Secret of the Gray Turret,* and others, I studied the cover illustration again.

The author-artist had depicted his subject in a pose at once formalized and dashing. The booted, spurred feet were planted jauntily apart, toes pointing outward at what must have been an uncomfortable angle. The right hand was thrust into the front of the dragoon jacket, Napoleon fashion, while the left rested elegantly upon a saber-hilt. It was all a trifle ludicrous and waxworky. I might have laughed at it, except for the face.

It was a round face, framed in heavy side-whiskers. The eyes beneath the cap-vizor were large and expressionless, and so placed as to seem to stare out at anyone who looked at the picture. Below and between them jutted a long, straight nose, thin and sharp as a chisel. The mouth was half open and lipless, and showed two tiny, pointed upper teeth. The chin—well, there was no chin, or very little. Despite the crudity and stiff-

ness of the old woodcut as a whole, that countenance had something of dread, authentic life. I paused to throw more floor-boards on the fire, then opened the pamphlet and began to read.

THE opening of the narrative was flat, in keeping with the style of the 1840's. It said, rather casually, that one Ivan Stanlas was born in Prussia near the Polish border about the year 1810, and that he came to America as a boy of twelve. In 1827, five years after his arrival, he enlisted in the United States army. His record, it appeared, was good, even brilliant—the anonymous biographer suggested that had Stanlas been of American birth he might have won an officer's commission. Foreigner though he was, he rose rapidly to the rank of sergeant first class, and as such did several tours of duty at forts in the south and west. At the outbreak of the Mexican War he saw active service with a dragoon regiment and was wounded at Monterey. In 1847 he was senior noncommissioned officer of a squadron ordered to build and garrison a fort in the western part of the newly acquired territory of Texas.

Up to this point the narrator had seemed vague, as if information on Sergeant Stanlas' early career was his only by hearsay, but the incident of the fort-building and all that followed was by contrast extraordinarily clear and vivid. I, reading by the firelight, guessed that the unknown pamphleteer must have made Stanlas' actual acquaintance at that time; perhaps the forming of the squadron brought together the units in which the two men had been serving.

The fort came in for full, eloquent description—a rectangular stockade of upright logs with sharp tips, rough barracks and stables in orderly array inside, neat ricks of hay cut on the prairies, troops drilling or working under the eyes of their officers, sentries on post, and over all the brilliant stir of the Stars and Stripes. The war was over now; the garrison felt relieved and relaxed, even peaceful. But a terror was to come that would dwarf the grimmest adventure of the oldest and most seasoned veteran.

Nothing for a time but boresome routine. Then, twice in succession, the account stated, sentries were found dead in the dawn—or rather, what was left of sentries.

The bodies were mangled, mutilated, bloody, the fleshiest parts cut clean away and missing. Indian raiders, was the instant pronouncement of the commanding officer, and after the second atrocity a scouting party was sent out to find and punish the enemy. Stanlas himself rode with that party and it was he who found, or appeared to find, a trail. Following him, the avengers rode for four hours across the prairie and came at last upon an encampment of Comanche hunters.

Taken by surprize, a full half of the Indians fell before the first deadly volley of the troops. The others fled on their swiftest ponies without offering battle. Several wounded Indians were captured and questioned, but all denied attacking or even visiting the fort. They feared, it seemed, a devil that sneaked and hunted around their campfires at night and devoured women, children and even full-grown warriors—a devil that lurked and laired among the white men.

The soldiers naturally scorned this story as fantastic and brought back the prisoners, five of them. As they approached the fort, it was recorded, the Indians trembled fearfully. That night they were placed in the hospital building, and on the following morning one was missing. He was reported "escaped despite severe wounds and close guard," and double vigilance was instituted. A

day and a night passed, a new sun rose, and a second Indian had vanished.

Stanlas happened to be sergeant of the guard on this particular morning, and the commander of the garrison, investigating in the hospital, called upon him for a report. As Stanlas entered, the three remaining Indians set up a wild and unwarriorly wail of terror. All jabbering at once, they expressed sudden dread of the sergeant. He, they charged, had killed and carried away their two comrades—he was the "devil of the fort" which they now knew would be their ultimate destroyer.

Stanlas listened in scornful silence for a moment or two, then broke in upon their frantic charges with angry denials. When they refused to retract, he whipped out his saber and slashed the nearest Indian across the face. Disarmed by two troopers, he was placed under arrest by the commander. A routine search of his quarters was ordered.

As senior sergeant of the garrison, Stanlas had a one-room cabin to himself, and the flooring in it proved loose (reading at this point, I glanced down nervously at the vacant space I had torn in the floor of my own shelter). The boards lifted, searchers saw loose earth. A few probing digs with a spade discovered the skeletons of the two missing Indians, stripped almost entirely of flesh.

From this point forward the narrative grew tense and fascinatingly dire, as if the author was bringing a morbid warmth to his work. Sergeant Stanlas, confronted with the grisly findings, confessed to cannibalism. He had murdered and eaten, not only these and other Indians, but the two butchered sentries and many other white men and women in the East. How many, he did not know; all he could say was "more than fifty, perhaps a hundred." Explanation he could not or would not give, except that he was tormented with an overpowering hunger for human flesh. He relished most the heart and the liver.

Facing the court-martial, he pleaded guilty and made a singular request. That speech of Sergeant Stanlas sticks closest in my memory, for I returned later and read it again:

"Burn me to ashes, I greatly wish it. Only thus can my soul be redeemed."

The officers of the court-martial—they must have been a shocked and pallid gathering—passed sentence, but decreed a less painful death than the one for which the confessed man-eater had begged. He was placed before a firing-squad, to make which, the pamphlet said, every one of his former comrades volunteered. After Stanlas had fallen before their shots, the sergeant in charge of the detail walked close to examine him. The bloody form was seen to move, the eyes slowly opened. Drawing a pistol, the sergeant fired a bullet point-blank through Stanlas' brain, and a few minutes later a medical officer pronounced the guilty one dead. The riddled corpse was buried outside the fort at a considerable distance from the regular cemetery and was left unmarked.

That was the end of the account, at least of the printed part. But at the foot of the final page was a rusty-looking smudge. I drew a brand from the fire to shed brighter and more direct light. With difficulty I made out a single word, written crabbedly and in ink so ancient and faded as to be almost invisible: *"Fools."*

I closed the pamphlet and gazed once more at the portrait of Ivan Stanlas upon the cover. As before, the expressionless eyes seemed to stare fixedly at me; even so, I mused, must the real man's eyes have looked while his fellow-sergeant gave him the *coup de grace*. And the loose

mouth seemed to smile at me in mockery. I felt suddenly nauseated with the blood-boltered tale. Whether it was true or not I refused to guess. My chief desire was to forget it as quickly as possible, to find more pleasant reading-matter for a lonely night in a strange, isolated cabin. Dropping the pamphlet to the floor, I turned my attention to the other papers in my lap.

There remained a couple of loose sheets or scraps, fastened together with a corroded pin. Removing this, I studied the topmost fragment.

It was a roughly torn upper quarter of an inside page from an old newspaper. At the top margin I could make out a part of a heading: "*. . . ita Eagle, July 11, 1879.*" The torn piece was three columns wide and filled with short news items, mostly paragraphs with date-lines, grist of the journal's telegraph mill. To such inner pages might a reader turn leisurely after he had satisfied a more pressing news hunger with long accounts on the front page of war in Europe or scandal at home. Around one of the small items, centrally located on the middle column of the sheet, was drawn a bold circle in dark ink, as if to direct attention to it.

The headline, also included within the circle, was in small type, and I remember it as follows:

MERCY FOR SOLDIER-MURDERER
Sgt. Maxim's Death Sentence Commuted

Beneath this I read, substantially in these words:

Fort Fetterman, Wyo., July 9—The War Department today ordered the sentence of Sergeant Wilfred Maxim, previously condemned to death by court-martial, to be commuted to life imprisonment.

Maxim, who was convicted of a strange and brutal crime—the killing of a civilian laborer and the drinking of his blood—had been hanged in full view of his former comrades some weeks ago. Pronounced dead and cut down, he revived. When ordered to mount the scaffold and be hanged a second time, he protested that, being once certified deceased, the full penalty of his crime was paid and he should be set free. He was held prisoner while the higher authority at Washington was consulted and handed down the commutation of sentence.

A special guard will take Maxim to Fort Leavenworth for confinement.

Just below this final short paragraph came the juncture of the two ends of the line that formed the inked circle, and the pen had apparently wavered over them. No, not exactly; on closer examination I was sure that a word had been written beneath the item and upon the line of the circle, a scrawled, crabbed word: "*Fools.*"

I twitched nervously, and my hands involuntarily clenched. The crackling sound of the old paper as it squashed in my grip made me start violently. I frowned in uneasy mystification.

Brief as the news article was, and almost deadly dull in its patterned journalistic phraseology, it reeked with unvoiced dread. What did it mean—it and the pamphlet which told a tale so ghastlily parallel?

Two murderers had lived, two veritable vultures in man's guise, one exposed in 1847, the other thirty-two years later in 1879. Each was an army man, each had the special ability and personality to win himself a sergeant's stripes. Each killed his fellow-man in secret, for the gratification of a horrible hunger. Each was condemned to death, and each proved almost impossible to kill. Each man's story had been published, and some collector of strange and revolting data had found both accounts, hiding them together under the floor of this old cabin—yes, and each published story had come under the hand of a commentator who, through scorn or unbelief or macabre humor, had stamped each with the word: "*Fools.*"

I pored over the inked circle and the written word upon the newspaper. They, too, were faded, but not as much as the scrawl in the pamphlet, and the hand-

writing was strikingly similar. My judgment was that they were the work of the same penman, and that each was jotted down at the approximate time of the publication date of the account thus distinguished.

I LAID the half-crumpled fragment of newspaper on the floor beside the pamphlet. The remaining sheet stared up from my knee—a simple handbill, once folded small and now falling apart along its smoothed-out creases. It bore bold-faced type:

$100—REWARD—$100
For the Capture of
WILFRED MAXIM
ESCAPED MURDERER
July 14, 1879

A description followed, which I do not remember clearly except for one phrase: *"Age about 36."* So Sergeant Maxim and Sergeant Stanlas, at the times of their respective captures, had been alike in age as well as profession, rank and depraved appetite. I shook myself, as if to dislodge panicky thoughts that crept upon the fringes of my consciousness. A corner of the reward notice, I saw, drooped heavily. Something was pasted to its back. I turned it over.

A photograph looked up, a faded and discolored likeness of a uniformed man's head and shoulders. Under it was written, *"Bill Maxim, Jan. 7, 1872."* I knew that crabbed handwriting at once. I knew, too, the face—but that was unbelievable, unspeakable. . . .

The old soldier's cheeks and jaws were thickly bearded. I could barely see a loose, greedy-looking mouth in the midst of that bushy hair. But the eyes were wide and vacant under their joined brows, the nose jutted straight and chisel-sharp. I started to voice an exclamation, but my lips were gone dry and numb. I stooped slowly for the discarded pamphlet. My hands trembled as they held the two portraits toward the flickering light—the photograph and the wood-cut.

I was sure then, and gasped inarticulately with the fearful knowledge.

Ivan Stanlas, shot almost to pieces, had not rested in his disgraced, unmarked grave. He had struggled up from under that burden of earth, had walked again. He had joined the army under a new name, had risen in rank, and was caught as before in the act of feeding loathsomely. Better for him and for the world had his first court-martial done as he had pleaded—what were the words?

I fumbled through the pages to the back of the pamphlet. Again I read: "Burn me to ashes, I greatly wish it. Only thus can my soul be redeemed."

A certainty that was more terrifying than blackest mystery drew in upon me, like a strangling net. With all my strength I hurled pamphlet, newspaper and handbill into the fire. The flames crackled greedily over the old sheets, threw up bright tongues; yet I trembled with a chill that was not of the outer blizzard. And a voice soft as a sigh and fierce as a snarl spoke from the door: *"Fool! . . ."*

The door was open. A figure in a long, dark, formless garment like a cloak or blanket was standing there, shaking wreaths of snow from its head and shoulder. As I gaped, silent and helpless as a charmed bird before a snake, it glided forward to the fire. The enveloping robe sagged open, then slid gently downward from the upper part of the figure.

I saw a round face, pale as bleached bone. Coarse, bushy hair grew low and rank upon a narrow forehead. Wide, expressionless eyes fixed mine, gleaming above the thin nose that seemed to point the way for them with its tip. A shallow chin relaxed, a loose, lipless mouth

fell open. Two pointed upper teeth grinned at me.

I tried to say something, to threaten or beg, but I could not. I only shrank back, and he stole forward, into the stronger light. A hand extended toward me. I saw curved talons, thick hair matted upon wrist and back and palm. . . .

Then came a cry, powerful and ringing as a bugle, a torrent of strange, challenging words. Another figure was bursting through the door and toward us. The first comer turned hurriedly from me. For a moment I saw his pale, chisel-beaked face in profile, heard the cloak rustle like dried skin. Then the other was upon him in a rush.

Fierce eyes above a bristling beard, an assailing odor of garlic, drove into my mind that this was the mumbler I had met at the forest's edge. His upflung hand flourished a staff, a heavy, straight rod with a piece lashed upon it to form a cross. It did not strike, but the sergeant squeaked fearfully, like a bat, and cowered swaying before it. A foot tripped him and, as he fell sprawling, the same foot gave him a spurning shove that slid him in among the coals of the fire.

White flame sprang up all around and over him, as though he had exploded. I shuddered, and the next moment all was black silence to me.

I woke laggingly, to the touch of ministering hands, and found myself lying limply on the floor. Above me stooped the bearded face, anxious and kindly now.

"It is all over," came the grave, accented voice, with a note of triumph in it. "Long have I hunted and hoped, and today, when you entered his domain, I knew you would serve for bait. I made preparations and followed." He drew something from his pocket. "A stake through his heart and holy water would have been better, but the cross of whitethorn and the fire and this herb"—he threw a handful of garlic into the fireplace—"will serve. He—Stanlas or Maxim or whoever he is—will walk and raven no more."

Weakly I rose. Something made a feeble scuttling noise on the hearth, and I looked. The dying fire, now rank with the garlic vapors, was full of dark, fat-looking ashes that never came from wood. Out of these was scrambling some small creeper—a rat or lizard, perhaps. Before I got a fair glimpse of it my companion thrust it back with his staff. It did not appear again.

"Perhaps that was his cursed soul," commented my rescuer. "Do not be afraid, I know that all will be well. Before the Russian Revolution I was a priest in Moscow, and studied these things. By dawn his last shred of foul flesh, his last splinter of undead bone, will be consumed in the cleansing heat."

Stooping, he began to gather floorboards.

"You're a priest?" I repeated stupidly. "I was beginning to understand before you came. His story said that he wished to be burned."

"I knew of those writings, but I did not disturb them lest he be warned and guard against me. The ancient legends are not legends; they are truth denied by fear. In his first existence he was *volkodlok*—werewolf. Facing death, he must have had a desperate hope of salvation, and he made that request. He knew that, if he were killed painlessly and his body left whole, he would still live as *upir*—what you call vampire."

He threw his armful of wood upon the fire, and it began to crackle with bright, merry warmth.

"My son," said the priest, "have the fear of God before your eyes."

# Attorney for the Damned

By RENIER WYERS

*The story of a lawyer who murdered Public Enemy Number One—and the strange doom that sought him out*

CAMBERTON knew, by the muffled ring, which of his two telephones to pick up. Yet, he hesitated. Who could be calling him at this late hour, on this secret, unlisted wire?

Only six of his underworld clients knew the number. Two of these gentlemen of doubtful integrity had just gone out the door; two were in Europe, and one in prison. The sixth was Burke Hawtin. But—Burke Hawtin was dead!

The muffled bell rang again. Camberton's pudgy hand closed on the cradled instrument and lifted it to his ear. He said nothing. He never spoke first on this line. Whoever knew the number of it was expected to know also the code word which had to be uttered before Camberton would respond.

Presently the word came: "Reference-room." It was spoken in low, unfamiliar tones.

"Who are you?" rasped Camberton. His round, pasty face was an expressionless mask, save for the glint of suspicion in his beady, fat-encircled eyes.

"A friend of Hawtin's," the unknown whispered. "He gave me this number. Said for me to call it when—when I'm in a jam."

"What's your name?"

"Smith. John Smi——"

"Very unusual," sneered Camberton. "I've never heard it before. I don't know you."

"Wait. You'll know me when you see me."

"Why should I see you?"

"Because I've got plenty of money for legal advice. Are you alone?"

"Yes, I am," drawled Camberton in a bored tone which was belied by the greed in his piggish eyes. "Do you know how to get here?"

"I know everything about you that Hawtin knew. I'll come up the back way—like—like *he* always did. I'll be there in ten minutes."

Horace L. Camberton, criminal lawyer, any way you say it, put down the telephone, leaned back in his chair and looked again at the newspaper item which he had been reading before the interruption. Early that morning, according to the item, Burke Hawtin and two confederates were shot to death while looting the First Industrial Bank of Willow Ridge, a southwestern suburb of Chicago. Hawtin's corpse was identified by the police. The other two had apparently been crime recruits. Their names were as yet unknown.

Camberton's only pang of regret, on reading the item, was in his purse. Hawtin had been a well-paying client; and, although he had not required legal counsel during the past year, he would have, sooner or later, had he not been mowed down.

Perhaps, reflected the attorney, this stranger who had just telephoned would take the place of the dear departed as a source of revenue. However, one couldn't be too sure. It was best to prepare for any kind of a comer.

From his library table, Camberton transferred a loaded revolver to his right-

hand coat-pocket. Then he went into the bedchamber and opened the top drawer of his bureau. From this he took another loaded pistol which he dropped into his left-hand pocket.

He waddled impatiently back and forth in the two rooms which comprised his suite in the Avon Arms Hotel, a receivership skyscraper towering in Diversey Parkway, east of Clark Street. It was a nest of shysters, racketeers, and elegantly clad hoodlums. Ordinarily he felt perfectly at home in this environment, in the shadow of the double-cross, but tonight he was uneasy. Never before had he been so apprehensive of impending trouble as he was now, while awaiting his nocturnal visitor.

Rather than be called upon to open the door and find himself only several inches from his guest, he released the latch, backed across the room and sat down on a straight-backed chair, facing the entrance. Each of his clammy hands was plunged into a pocket, gripping a gun.

"Now," he thought, "if I don't like your looks, Mr. Smith, or whoever, or whatever you are, I'll make you back right out again. Nobody's going to pull a fast one on little Horace."

THE knocking he presently heard was stealthy, almost inaudible. But loud and blustering was his response to it.

"Come in!" he shouted.

The door opened silently. A man whose broad shoulders and muscular arms bulged visibly under his tightly draped jacket stepped in and closed the door behind him. His right hand remained in his pocket, as though he, too, was grasping a weapon. With his other hand he tilted the dip-brimmed, summer-felt hat back from his forehead.

"Dernac!" exclaimed Camberton, jumping to his feet. There was no mistaking the name of this visitor. His face was pictured almost daily in the newspapers. He was Anton ("Tony") Dernac, widely publicized as America's Public Enemy Number One.

"So you do know me, after all," the stranger grunted, defiantly jutting out his jaw. "And you know there's a reward of twenty-five grand on my hide. But"—his pocketed hand lifted the coat slightly—"don't think you'll collect it. Besides, I can more than double the ante—if you'll work on my side."

Camberton's fat, greedy face broke into an oily grimace which he believed was a cordial smile. "Let's be friends," he said, extending a welcoming hand.

Dernac grinned out of the side of his mouth as he grasped the lawyer's flabby fingers in his own ham-like fist. "Okay. Now you're my mouthpiece and you'd better be a good one. That's what I need."

"You need a drink, too, my boy."

The two men sat down facing each other and talked; that is to say, Dernac talked. Camberton merely listened and watched his guest down one drink after another from the whisky bottle which the lawyer had placed on a convenient magazine table. Camberton, at the same time, simulated just the proper degree of sympathetic understanding. He was adept at it. It was in this way that he came to know so many things which necessitated such under-cover equipment as the secret telephone.

Dernac, the hunted, seemed eager to unburden himself to the attorney. For all his bulk and reputation as a hard hombre, he was plainly frightened. He had achieved too much notoriety for his peace of mind. Having lived by the gun he apparently feared death by the gun. Every man's hand was against him. He poured himself yet another drink and said:

"I met Hawtin in Minneapolis, about six months ago. He joined my gang and we did several jobs, payroll raids in St.

Louis. The last one there wasn't so good. Three of my boys were killed."

"I remember reading about that," remarked Camberton, "but I didn't know that Hawtin was there—or you either."

"Nobody knows it, now. Hawtin and the other two were killed this morning." The bandit licked his lips. "I almost went along—but I had a hunch. Besides, why should I take any chances when I've got more than a hundred grand salted away? Part of it was Hawtin's. But he's dead and the rest of the mob that ain't dead is in jail. So there's nobody left to split with—exceptin' you. How much will it cost me to get out of the country?"

CAMBERTON'S porcine eyes narrowed as he looked at his visitor. Was it really possible for such a hulking lout to retain so much loot? Would he give up half, three-quarters of it to save his skin? The attorney was confident that both questions could be answered in the affirmative.

"It'll be a hard job," he said. "Your picture, given to the police by that dame you ditched, is being printed so often, nowadays, that your face is as well known as Babe Ruth's. Your mug and description are posted in every police chief's office, in every detective bureau and agency in the country—and in every post-office."

"That's just it. Even people who only look like me are getting arrested and shot at!" cried Dernac. "What chance have I got?"

"A good chance," said Camberton, watching his client closely. "But, as I said, it'll be a hard job—and expensive. There will be certain preliminary costs. First of all, I'd have to hire someone to do a little plastic surgery on that well-known face of yours. Then, too, I'd have to pay for 'fixing' aids along the route you're to take and——"

"Hell!" exclaimed Dernac; "if you're worried about my bein' able to pay—here's twenty-five grand for a starter." He reached into his breast pocket and tossed a packet of greenbacks into the attorney's lap. "And remember, there's more than a hundred grand where that came from. It's all safe and snug under the floor of the Ideal Shoe Repair Shop, just a few blocks from here." He hiccupped. Then, loosening his tongue with another drink of whisky, he rambled on: "Yeah, I own the Ideal Shoe Repair Shop. The old shoemaker who's supposed to own it is just a stooge for me. He learned cobbling in the penitentiary."

"Does he know the money's there?"

"Ha, ha! Not much! Old Fred Miller's too dumb to ever know anything important. All he knows is that I sometimes used the joint for business meetings with Hawtin and the boys. I always sent Miller out with enough money to get drunk on. Other times he sleeps there. I chased him out tonight, figgerin' that me and you might take a walk over there after a while and settle our deal."

Mere slits now, the criminal lawyer's greedy eyes flashed from the money to Dernac. Camberton thought fast. How much money would it be worth to risk disbarment, perhaps prison, if anything went wrong in smuggling his client out of the United States? The problem caused a frown to crease his round bland face.

Like a flash an easy solution suggested itself. He leered sinisterly at Dernac. Startled, the fugitive reached for his gun, but the lawyer, with a speed surprizing in one so fat and flabby, whipped out his own pistol and fired before the other could take aim.

Public Enemy Number One toppled from the chair, a bullet in his head.

With a deep breath of satisfaction, inhaling a whiff of gunpowder smoke, Camberton noted that his victim's lifeless

hand still held a revolver. It would make the story of self-defense more dramatic. He arose, hurriedly put the packet of greenbacks in the wall-safe, leaving the door open, cleared away the whisky and glasses, and then picked up the telephone —the one connected with the hotel switchboard.

"Send for the police," he said calmly. "I've just shot a burglar. He looks like Tony Dernac."

POLICE officers, reporters, and hotel employees crowding into the suite a few moments later heard his thrilling narrative of how, upon returning from a stroll, he had caught Dernac in the act of ransacking the wall-safe.

"He rushed at me, his gun leveled at my heart. But I was quicker on the trigger."

"Ever see him before?" asked a police sergeant.

"Never. My guess as to his identity was based on press pictures I've seen."

"Gosh, Mr. Camberton," blurted one of the reporters. "You'll get the twenty-five thousand dollar reward!"

"That's so. I hadn't thought of it. I was merely trying to protect my life and property. I'll agree that perhaps I do deserve some reward for having rid society of a dangerous killer."

Highly pleased with himself, the lawyer then posed for innumerable newspaper photographs. He posed pointing his gun at the camera, pointing his finger at the wall-safe, shaking hands with the sergeant, shaking hands with the hotel manager, with bellhops, with chambermaids, with almost everyone excepting his dead victim. He obliged the cameramen willingly—refusing only the request of one who wanted him to stand with one foot resting on the corpse, in the manner of a big-game hunter. This, the attorney declared, would be beneath his dignity.

Not until the dark hour just before the dawn was he left alone. Excitedly he turned the leaves of his telephone directory, seeking the address of the Ideal Shoe Repair Shop. Here it was, "692 Elwell Court." Less than four blocks away! He patted the revolvers in his pockets, took an electric torch from his bureau, put on his hat and went out, leaving the building by a rear stairway.

ALTHOUGH only a few blocks from the brightly lighted corner of Clark and Broadway, Elwell Court was a shabby little side-street of dismal, frame shanties. Bleakest of these was number 692 with "Shoe Repairing" crudely lettered on the glass of the front door. It was hardly a place you would suspect of being the depository of a hundred thousand dollars in cash. Camberton, however, was confident that he would find this sum. He knew his crooks and had correctly judged Dernac as the simpleton that he was. The fool hadn't even put a modern lock on the door. Camberton's skeleton key opened it easily.

Inside, he observed that the weakened rays of a distant street lamp penetrated the grimy front windows just enough to cast a dim and eery light, blocked out here and there by machinery and furnishings which cast grotesque and misleading shadows. Feeling his way, he stepped forward. His shin encountered something in the dark—something that sprang through the air with a hissing spitting sound. Two yellow eyes glared balefully at him. He flashed his torch at it and cursed under his breath at the cat that arched its back in the glare. He threw the beam around the room to get his bearings.

There was a door at the rear of the shop. Camberton regarded it apprehensively as he put out the light. What if old Miller, who, according to Dernac,

sometimes slept in the rear of the shop, had returned? The lawyer decided to look into that back room before searching for the loot.

Tiptoeing forward, he placed his hand on the door-knob. As he turned it, slowly and silently, a strange fear gripped him. It was unusual; for, though he was not the bravest man in the world, he was certainly not one to be frightened by darkness and the angrily gleaming eyes of a cat. The touch of terror was caused by something else, he knew not what. It angered him.

Forgetting his caution, he jerked the door open. An icy draft swept round him, enveloping him so completely that he shivered with intense cold. There was something wrong about this, too, this chill on a warm, July night. It required all his will-power to stop the quivering of his fatty flesh as he stared into the room: it was better lighted than the other. The illumination which streamed through the window came from the rear porch light of a house next door.

Camberton's nervous scrutiny sweeping the room was halted and held by an object in the darkest corner. It seemed to be the figure of a man lying on a cot. So! That old cobbler, Miller, had come back to sleep off his drunkenness here! But the odor that assailed Camberton's nostrils was not of alcohol. It was of something equally familiar, something that did not belong here. Sniffing to clear his nostrils and at the same time firmly grasping his revolver, Camberton started to slink toward the recumbent form, then stood stock-still, wide-eyed with fright.

The figure on the cot was sitting up—and it wasn't the figure of an old man. It was the husky, broad-shouldered figure of Tony Dernac, America's Public Enemy Number One! Tony Dernac, whose corpse at this moment should be stretched on a slab in the county morgue, was sitting up. The face of the figure seemed to gleam with a greenish phosphorescent light, making more horrible the vilipending leer that was directed at the horrified attorney. In the forehead of the face was a bullet hole. And the odor that was creeping into Camberton's brain was the odor of burnt gunpowder!

His round countenance paled to sickly white. His eyes almost popped out of their thick, fleshy pouches. He moved his lips but could not utter a sound.

"You!" he managed to croak at last, "you—why, damn you, Dernac, I killed you once and I'll kill you again."

He aimed his pistol at the apparition. The shanty seemed to shake as the gun roared again and again. The spurts of gunfire seemed to pierce right through the figure which rose slowly from the cot and moved relentlessly toward Camberton, step by step. The lawyer backed away from it, firing desperately. Try as he might, he could not turn and run. The eyes staring into his with a hypnotic fixedness seemed to fasten his own with invisible bands, permitting him to step back only as far as the other had stepped forward, no farther.

SOBBING wildly, Camberton pulled out his other gun and emptied its contents at the wraith. Automatically his twitching fingers jerked at the triggers of the emptied weapons, clicking them futilely.

That was the way the police squad-car crew found him, idiotically clicking the triggers of two empty guns. The shooting had aroused the neighborhood and brought the prowl car to number 692 within three minutes of the first crack of the first gun.

The lifeless body of old Fred Miller, riddled with the bullets from the attorney's pistols, lay on the cot. That was all

that the police saw—that and the drooling madman who had once been Horace G. Camberton, well-known criminal attorney, pressing the revolver triggers like an automaton.

It is hardly likely that he will ever be tried for the murder of the aged shoemaker because he does not seem able to comprehend what he's done. In an asylum for the criminal insane, he crouches in his cell, insisting that he and Dernac were the only occupants of the back room at number 692.

Few people are permitted to visit the broken attorney. Fewer care to do so, since, as the authorities explain it, the mad terror which creeps over his face at intervals is of such awfulness that the most hardened observers shudder at the sight of it. The intervals are becoming more and more frequent. And, should the apparent suffering he experiences in these intervals become a permanent mental condition, it will not be necessary to punish Horace L. Camberton further for his crimes.

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# Lesandro's Familiar

By AUGUST W. DERLETH

*A brief tale about Cesare Borgia and an adept of Black Magic*

IN THE middle of that morning, the troops of the Prince Cardinal Cesare Borgia arrived at the wide plain before the walled city of Celsina. Celsina was not impregnable, but it was known to be the abode of one Messer Lesandro, not ill-called *The Fox,* by profession a mage, by position actual ruler of Celsina in the absence of the Principessa Giuliana di Marvezzi, who was cousin to Duke Oro di Orsini; these both doubtless in tacit support of Lesandro's stewardship.

It was necessary that Celsina be taken without assault, for it lay in the direct path of the troops to Parallo, where Oro di Orsini was encamped with his *condottieri,* the objective of the Borgia's campaign. Methods of warfare must be discarded not because Cesare had no quarrel with the Principessa di Marvezzi, but, though she was a cousin of Orsini, who had raised his standards against the banner of the Bull, she was also related too closely to the house of Medici, and it was not fitting that any affront be offered to the Florentines on this occasion. Now Cesare well knew that the attitude of Messer Lesandro would have been dictated by Orsini, and it was better for the nonce to pause and prevent the Fox from opposing the Borgia standards. So the troops encamped there on the plain, and Cesare retired to a hill to give adequate thought to the problem of making Celsina accessible without battle.

Apart from his desire to obtain the freedom of the city—this being necessary in order to prevent any surprize movement from the rear after his troops marched ahead on Orsini in Parallo—Cesare also held close a desire for the settlement of an old score with the

magician, who had, a space some twelvemonth back, cruelly tortured to death three envoys from Rome, among them the brother of a captain under the banner of the Bull. He felt it necessary to bring about not only the quiet entrance to Celsina, but also the death of Lesandro, without giving Orsini, and, more important, the Principessa di Marvezzi, cause for suspicion and anger.

But one thing loomed above lesser obstacles, and that was Messer Lesandro's profession. The Prince Borgia was not eager to encounter magic without weapons of a like nature at his command. Pondering this, he bethought himself of one Paolo Vincelli, a youth within his ranks who professed to be a student of all things beyond the understanding of man, and presently, considering the youth, Cesare sent for him.

He came, a slim, dark soldier, not yet thirty, yet not without age in his eyes and the aloof curve of his lips and brows.

"Your Highness sent for me?"

"Be seated. Messer Vincelli, it comes to me that you are skilled in the black art."

The youth deprecated gently.

Wasting no words, Cesare explained to the young magician what problem occupied his mind. Then for some time both sat in thoughtful silence.

"I have heard of this Lesandro," said Vincelli presently, "and I am not afraid to deal with him. But we must first have entrance to the city, lest he confound me with spells before the gates.

"I have observed some time back the passage of various travelers on the roads to Celsina, and it has seemed to me that we might well so enter the city, by skirting the enclosing hills and approaching Celsina from the direction of Parallo, arriving at the gates at nightfall. There is doubtless a password in use of which you may know."

Cesare nodded. "Yes, it is 'Orsini'."

"Orsini, then. We shall arrive at nightfall. You shall be garbed as a friar, and I as your barber. In that manner we will gain entrance to the city. Entrance to the Palazzo Marvezzi where Lesandro is must be gained by you."

"As a friar from Francesco—it is well known that the Cardinal Orsini stands behind Oro; and he would use a friar, would he not?" said Cesare.

This arrangement agreed upon, the two returned to their quarters, Cesare to rid himself of his mustache and to brown his face, Vincelli to demean himself according to the habit of the profession he must assume.

IN THAT afternoon and evening, events took place as Vincelli had foreseen, and presently the two of them stood in the darkness before the Palazzo Marvezzi, where Cesare humbly, as befitted his calling, accosted a guard.

"Orsini," he whispered. "We come from Parallo, and must have immediate audience with Lesandro."

The guard looked doubtful, but said, "Wait here," and turned to consult his superior officer, who stood before the great double doors themselves. This man in turn eyed them, said something in an undertone to the guard, and disappeared within the palace. The guard returned.

"It will be seen to," he said.

They waited.

Presently the second guard returned, nodded briefly to his companion, and held open the door. "Messer Lesandro will see you," he said.

Turning before them then, he led the way into the palace, up a broad flight of stairs and down a corridor to a door at its end. There he paused, saying, "He is within."

Cesare nodded confidently. "Convey

my barber to the lackeys' quarters until I am ready again," he said.

Then he opened the door and entered the room.

It was a long, dark room, with a low ceiling, and so overhung with draperies that it seemed shapeless amid overbearing shadows pressing inward from its walls. At a massive table near its far end sat Messer Lesandro, an incredibly aged man, whose long beard was still faintly streaked with black. He turned dark, brooding eyes on Cesare but said not a word.

"I am come from Parallo, from di Orsini," said Cesare.

In a voice so pleasant that it was sinister, the magician interrupted him, "I am honored by a visit from Your Highness."

At the same moment he raised a hand-glass from the table and turned it toward Cesare. The Prince Borgia saw reflected in the glass not himself as a disguised friar, but in all his cardinal's robes, with the insignia of the house of Borgia fluttering from his cap.

"A mirror like mine is a fortunate possession," said the mage.

Immediately Cesare dropped his pose, flung back his hood, and said harshly, "Well done, Lesandro. We are understood."

"I understand your plans, yes. Even now your mage, Vincelli, is hemmed about by such terrors as I have seen fit to throw about him. A poor creature to bring along to accomplish my death! You are a fool to venture into my presence with such as he to serve you."

"Men have died for saying less than that to me," said Cesare gratingly.

"Mere men," murmured the mage, in no manner disturbed, and added, ominously, "There is small likelihood of your returning to your camp this night." It was as if he had said there was no likelihood of the Prince Borgia's leaving the house alive.

It was borne in upon Cesare then that he was in exceedingly great danger, though this did not unduly disturb him, since he had often been in danger of his life before this. His first impulse was to draw his blade from beneath his habit and run Lesandro through, but he thought better of it and decided to wait for the wizard's next move.

This came presently, with terrifying effect.

From the corner of his mouth, Messer Lesandro spoke a blasphemous word. Instantly came an answer, but it was not in sound. It came instead in movement, first a barely perceptible stirring of the shadows beyond the bent figure of the mage, then a billowing upward, as of smoke, and finally a coming together of darkness and nameless shadows. Then a blasphemous monstrosity stood behind Lesandro, a huge, misshapen entity bent against the low ceiling above the mage; about it was an ominous atmosphere of waiting.

Cesare looked his amazement.

"My familiar," said Lesandro mockingly. "He has served me long and well, and another before me. He waits now for my command." He smiled bleakly, and for a moment his eyes flamed. Then he turned to the thing behind him and spoke to it. "There is in the quarters of the lackeys a soldier calling himself Vincelli and now habited as a barber. I wish him to die."

In a flash the monstrosity had vanished, passing Cesare like a small wind.

Conquering his momentary horror, Cesare leaped to the table, seized the hour-glass that stood upon it, and raised his arm to strike Lesandro down. But in midair his arm was paralyzed, and his legs as well, so that he stood there before the mage as if graven in stone.

Yet Lesandro had not moved. Now he sat smiling, his eyes seeing Cesare and yet beyond him, and he said slowly, "For that you will die a thousand deaths. There is a means at hand for me to summon demons from the nethermost regions, and these are accomplished at torture."

For the first time then, Lesandro rose. He went into the shadows of the room and came back presently with a brazier, from which pale green smoke ascended. For a moment only his eyes glowed redly through the smoke and his teeth shone through his beard as he laughed at Cesare.

"Spare the barber," said Cesare then.

"I am not given to mercy, Your Highness," scoffed the mage.

"What holds me here?" demanded Cesare.

The magician shrugged. "A little magic, but chiefly power from my will. Be patient."

ABRUPTLY the wizard raised his head to listen. There was a rushing sound beyond the room, far down the hall, on the stairs. Cesare felt the paralysis in his limbs relax and a weakness come upon them. The mage stood listening, one hand upraised as if in warning to be still. The sound was like a great wind, like a gale in the corridor.

Then the door burst open and, in a cloud of mephitic odor, Lesandro's familiar appeared, hesitating on the threshold. But only for a second did it falter; then it launched forward, terribly, and descended like a fog before Cesare's eyes, surrounding the mage, its master.

Cesare felt his limbs abruptly free. He had supposed that the familiar was returning to slay him as well, but this apparently was not so. Strange, gasping sounds emerged from the fog beyond the table, quick, urgent noises as of violent struggle—a clang and rattle as the brazier on the table tipped and rolled to the floor—a shattering sound as the hourglass broke.

Then, as suddenly as it had come, the cloud and the familiar were gone. Beyond the table lay the body of Messer Lesandro, brutally twisted and broken, on his face horror the like of which the Prince Borgia had not looked upon before.

"Take off your habit, and step upon the balcony, Your Highness. By showing yourself to the populace from Lesandro's room, the gates will easily be opened to our troops."

Cesare whirled.

It was Vincelli who stood upon the threshold.

"Blood of the saints! I thought you dead!"

"I do not die easily," said Vincelli.

"But you, a student, to confound a master of the black art!" And Cesare paused, his eyes demanding explanation.

"My grandfather was the great mage Orvolo Vincellente. He had two students, myself and Lesandro, who fled him, taking my grandfather's familiar with him. There was no greater mage than Orvolo Vincellente. He taught Lesandro almost all he knew; he taught me *all* he knew. Thus I was able to send Lesandro's familiar back upon him to destroy him." He paused, smiling faintly, and added, "Will Your Highness step upon the balcony?"

# The Red Brain*

By DONALD WANDREI

ONE by one the pale stars in the sky overhead had twinkled fainter and gone out. One by one those flaming lights had dimmed and darkened. One by one they had vanished for ever, and in their places had come patches of ink that blotted out immense areas of a sky once luminous with stars.

Years had passed; centuries had fled backward; the accumulating thousands had turned into millions, and they, too, had faded into the oblivion of eternity. The earth had disappeared. The sun had cooled and hardened, and had dissolved into the dust of its grave. The solar system and innumerable other systems had broken up and vanished, and their fragments had swelled the clouds of dust which were engulfing the entire universe. In the billions of years which had passed, sweeping everything on toward the gathering doom, the huge bodies, once countless, that had dotted the sky and hurtled through unmeasurable immensities of space had lessened in number and disintegrated until the black pall of the sky was broken only at rare intervals by dim spots of light—light ever growing paler and darker.

No one knew when the dust had begun to gather, but far back in the forgotten dawn of time the dead worlds had vanished, unremembered and unmourned.

Those were the nuclei of the dust. Those were the progenitors of the universal dissolution which now approached its completion. Those were the stars which had first burned out, died, and wasted away in myriads of atoms. Those were the mushroom growths which had first passed into nothingness in a puff of dust.

Slowly the faint wisps had gathered into clouds, the clouds into seas, and the seas into monstrous oceans of gently heaving dust, dust that drifted from dead and dying worlds, from interstellar collisions of plunging stars, from rushing meteors and streaming comets which flamed from the void and hurtled into the abyss.

The dust had spread and spread. The dim luminosity of the heavens had become fainter as great blots of black appeared far in the outer depths of Space.

* From WEIRD TALES for October, 1927.

In all the millions and billions and trillions of years that had fled into the past, the Cosmic Dust had been gathering, and the starry horde had been dwindling. There was a time when the universe consisted of hundreds of millions of stars, planets, and suns; but they were ephemeral as life or dreams, and they faded and vanished, one by one.

The smaller worlds were obliterated first, then the larger, and so in ever-ascending steps to the unchecked giants which roared their fury and blazed their whiteness through the conquering dust and the realms of night. Never did the Cosmic Dust cease its hellish and relentless war on the universe; it choked the little aerolites; it swallowed the helpless satellites; it swirled around the leaping comets that rocketed from one black end of the universe to the other, flaming their trailing splendor, tearing paths of wild adventure through horizonless infinitudes the dust already ruled; it clawed at the planets and sucked their very being; it washed, hateful and brooding, about the monarchs and plucked at their lands and deserts.

Thicker, thicker, always thicker grew the Cosmic Dust, until the giants no longer could watch each other's gyres far across the void. Instead, they thundered through the waste, lonely, despairing, and lost. In solitary grandeur they burned their brilliant beauty. In solitary defeat and death they disappeared.

Of all the stars in all the countless host that once had spotted the heavens, there remained only Antares. Antares, immensest of the stars, alone was left, the last body in the universe, inhabited by the last race ever to have consciousness, ever to live. That race, in hopeless compassion, had watched the darkening skies and had counted with miserly care the stars which resisted. Every one that twinkled out wrenched their hearts; every one that ceased to struggle and was swallowed by the tides of dust added a new strain to the national anthem, that indescribable melody, that infinitely somber pean of doom which tolled a solemn harmony in every heart of the dying race. The dwellers had built a great crystal dome around their world in order to keep out the dust and to keep in the atmosphere, and under this dome the watchers kept their silent sentinel. The shadows had swept in faster and faster from the farther realms of darkness, engulfing more rapidly the last of the stars. The astronomers' task had become easier, but the saddest on Antares: that of watching Death and Oblivion spread a pall of blackness over all that was, all that would be.

The last star, Mira, second only to Antares, had shone frostily pale, twinkled more darkly—and vanished. There was nothing in all Space except an illimitable expanse of dust that stretched on and on in every direction; only this, and Antares. No longer did the astronomers watch the heavens to glimpse again that dying star before it succumbed. No longer did they scan the upper reaches—everywhere swirled the dust, enshrouding Space with a choking blackness. Once there had been sown through the abyss a multitude of morbidly beautiful stars, whitely shining, wan—now there was none. Once there had been light in the sky—now there was none. Once there had been a dim phosphorescence in the vault—now it was a heavy-hanging pall of ebony, a rayless realm of gloom, a smothering thing of blackness eternal and infinite.

"WE MEET again in this Hall of the Mist, not in the hope that a remedy has been found, but that we find how best it is fitting that we die. We meet, not in the vain hope that we may

control the dust, but in the hope that we may triumph even as we are obliterated. We cannot win the struggle, save in meeting our death heroically."

The speaker paused. All around him towered a hall of Space rampant. Far above spread a vague roof whose flowing sides melted into the lost and dreamy distances, a roof supported by unseen walls and by the mighty pillars which rolled upward at long intervals from the smoothly marbled floor. A faint haze seemed always to be hanging in the air because of the measureless lengths of that architectural colossus. Dim in the distance, the speaker reclined on a metal dais raised above the sea of beings in front of him. But he was not, in reality, a speaker, nor was he a being like those which had inhabited the world called Earth.

Evolution, because of the unusual conditions on Antares, had proceeded along lines utterly different from those followed on the various bodies which had dotted the heavens when the deep was sprinkled with stars in the years now gone. Antares was the hugest sun that had leaped from the primeval chaos. When it cooled, it cooled far more slowly than the others, and when life once began it was assured of an existence not of thousands, not of millions, but of billions of years.

That life, when it began, had passed from the simple forms to the age of land juggernauts, and so by steps on and on up the scale. The civilizations of other worlds had reached their apex and the worlds themselves become cold and lifeless at the time when the mighty civilization of Antares was beginning. The star had then passed through a period of warfare until such terrific and fearful scourges of destruction were produced that in the Two Days War seven billion of the eight and one-half billion inhabitants were slaughtered. Those two days of carnage ended war for eons.

From then on, the golden age began. The minds of the people of Antares became bigger and bigger, their bodies proportionately smaller, until the cycle eventually was completed. Every being in front of the speaker was a monstrous heap of black viscidity, each mass an enormous Brain, a sexless thing that lived for thought. Long ago it had been discovered that life could be created artificially in tissue formed in the laboratories of the chemists. Sex was thus destroyed, and the inhabitants no longer spent their time in taking care of families. Nearly all the countless hours that were saved were put into scientific advance, with the result that the star leaped forward in an age of progress never paralleled.

The beings, rapidly becoming Brains, found that by the extermination of the parasites and bacteria on Antares, by changing their own organic structure, and by *willing* to live, they approached immortality. They discovered the secrets of Time and Space; they knew the extent of the universe, and how Space in its farther reaches became self-annihilating. They knew that life was self-created and controlled its own period of duration. They knew that when a life, tired of existence, killed itself, it was dead for ever; it could not live again, for death was the final chemical change of life.

These were the shapes that spread in the vast sea before the speaker. They were shapes because they could assume any form they wished. Their all-powerful minds had complete control of that which was themselves. When the Brains were desirous of traveling, they relaxed from their usual semi-rigidity and flowed from place to place like a stream of ink rushing down a hill; when they were

*(Please turn to page 630)*

# COMING NEXT MONTH

HE STOPPED suddenly, looking up the street. A hush had descended abruptly all along it, the people on porches who had been talking becoming suddenly silent and going inside. Women farther down the street were hastily calling in children who had been playing. Those who had sauntered along the sidewalk hastily turned in at houses.

A man was coming down the street from the illuminated upper end. He was a tall, straight black figure against that illumination, wearing a soft black hat and also a long black coat despite the evening's warmth, and carrying a stick. As he came closer, Millera drew us back into the shadows. Now the man was passing.

He was old, I saw, for his face, half visible in the darkness, was wrinkled, and the hair at his temples was iron-gray. His eyes were hidden by his hat's shadow, but we could see that his features were sardonic, strongly cut, powerful. He walked past with deliberate strides, and as he went on down the street those who had retreated inside their houses emerged again onto their porches, looking after his dark form until it disappeared in the darkness at the street's lower end.

"Who was that?" Doctor Dale asked, and Domenic Millera shook his fist passionately at the darkness that had swallowed the dark figure.

"It was the *jettatore,* the evil-eyed one you asked about! Yes, Peter Mione himself, head of that accursed house of the evil eye!" . . .

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## The Red Brain

*(Continued from page 628)*

tired, they flattened into disks; when expounding their thoughts, they became towering pillars of rigid ooze; and when lost in abstraction, or in a pleasurable contemplation of the unbounded worlds created in their minds, within which they often wandered, they resembled huge, dormant balls.

From the speaker himself had come no sound, although he had imparted his thoughts to his sentient assembly. The thoughts of the Brains, when their minds permitted, emanated to those about them instantly, like electric waves. Antares was a world of unbroken silence.

The Great Brain's thoughts continued to flow out. "Long ago, the approaching doom became known to us all. We could do nothing. It does not matter greatly, of course, for existence is a useless thing which benefits no one. But nevertheless, at that meeting in an unremembered year, we asked those who were willing to try to think of some possible way of saving our own star, at least, if not the others. There was no reward offered, for there was no reward adequate. All that the Brain would receive would be glory as one of the greatest which has ever been produced. The rest of us, too, would receive only the effects of that glory in the knowledge that we had conquered Fate, hitherto, and still, considered inexorable; we would derive pleasure only from the fact that we, self-creating and all but supreme, had made ourselves supreme by conquering the most powerful menace which has ever attacked life, time, and the universe: the Cosmic Dust.

"Our most intelligent Brains have been thinking on this one subject for untold millions of years. They have excluded from their thoughts everything except the question: How can the dust be checked? They have produced innumerable plans which have been tested thoroughly. All have failed. We have hurled into the void uncontrollable bolts of lightning, interplanetary sheets of flame, in the hope that we might fuse masses of the dust into new, incandescent worlds. We have anchored huge magnets throughout Space, hoping to attract the dust, which is faintly magnetic, and thus to solidify it or clear much of it from the waste. We have caused fearful disturbances by exploding our most powerful compounds in the realms about us, hoping to set the dust so violently in motion that chaos would become tempestuous with the storms of creation. With our rays of annihilation, we have blasted billion-mile paths through the ceaselessly surging dust. We have destroyed the life on Betelgeuse and rooted there titanic developers of vacua, sprawling, whirring machines to suck the dust from Space and heap it up on that star. We have liberated enormous quantities of gas, lit them, and sent the hot and furious fires madly flashing through the affrighted dust. In our desperation, we have even asked for the aid of the Ether-Eaters. Yes, we have in finality exercised our Will-Power to sweep back the rolling billows! In vain! What has been accomplished? The dust has retreated for a moment, has paused—and has welled onward. It has returned silently triumphant, and it has again hung its pall of blackness over a fear-haunted, nightmare-ridden Space."

Swelling in soundless sorrow through the Hall of the Mist rose the racing thoughts of the Great Brain. "Our chemists with a bitter doggedness never before displayed have devoted their time to the production of Super-Brains, in the hope of making one which could defeat the Cosmic Dust. They have changed the chemicals used in our genesis; they

have experimented with molds and forms; they have tried every resource. With what result? There have come forth raging monstrosities, mad abominations, satanic horrors and ravenous foul things howling wildly the nameless and indescribable phantoms that thronged their minds. We have killed them in order to save ourselves. And the Dust has pushed onward! We have appealed to every living Brain to help us. We appealed, in the forgotten dream-veiled centuries, for aid in any form. From time to time we have been offered plans, which for a while have made terrific inroads on the Dust, but plans which have always failed.

"The triumph of the Cosmic Dust has almost come. There is so little time left us that our efforts now must inevitably be futile. But today, in the hope that some Brain, either of the old ones or of the gigantic new ones, has discovered a possibility not yet tried, we have called this conference, the first in more than twelve thousand years."

THE tense, alert silence of the hall relaxed and became soft when the thoughts of the Great Brain had stopped flowing. The electric waves which had filled the vast Hall of the Mist sank, and for a long time a strange tranquillity brooded there. But the mass was never still; the sea in front of the dais rippled and billowed from time to time as waves of thought passed through it. Yet no Brain offered to speak, and the seething expanse, as the minutes crept by, again became quiet.

In a thin column on the dais, rising high into the air, swayed the Great Brain; again and again it swept its glance around the hall, peering among the rolling, heaving shapes in the hope of finding somewhere in those thousands one which could

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THE TRUTH THAT WAS DAMNED

Man dared become masterful and independent! Centuries ago he began to probe the mysteries of the universe, to disclose the hidden truths of nature. Astounding results were achieved—miracles, some declared them. The conditions which enslaved men and women—misfortune, disease and dispair—were conquered. This wealth of knowledge was accumulated in vast temples and seats of learning available to all who sought it. This growing power and knowledge of the masses was a challenge to selfish rulers and corrupt priesthoods. Alexandria was ordered burned, Tripoli destroyed. The rare knowledge was damned, seized and burned.

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## The Red Brain

*(Continued from page 631)*

offer a suggestion. But the minutes passed, and time lengthened, with no response; and the sadness of the fixed and changeless end crept across the last race. And the Brains, wrapped in their meditation, saw the Dust pushing at the glass shell of Antares with triumphant mockery.

The Great Brain had expected no reply, since for centuries it had been considered futile to combat the Dust; and so, when its expectation, though not its wish, was fulfilled, it relaxed and dropped, the signal that the meeting was over.

But the motion had scarcely been completed, when from deep within the center of the sea there came a violent heave; in a moment, a section collected itself and rushed together; like a waterspout it swished upward and went streaming toward the roof until it swayed thin and tenuous as a column of smoke, the top of the Brain peering down from the dimness of the upper hall.

"I have found an infallible plan! The Red Brain has conquered the Cosmic Dust!"

A terrific tenseness leaped upon the Brains, numbed by the cry that wavered in silence down the Hall of the Mist into the empty and dreamless tomb of the farther marble. The Great Brain, hardly relaxed, rose again. And with a curious whirling motion the assembled horde suddenly revolved. Immediately, the Red Brain hung upward from the middle of a sea which had become an amphitheater in arrangement, all Brains looking toward the center. A suppressed expectancy and hope electrified the air.

The Red Brain was one of the later creations of the chemists, and had come forth during the experiments to produce more perfect Brains. Previously, they had all been black; but, perhaps because of impurities in the chemicals, this one had evolved in an extremely dark, dull-red color. It was regarded with wonder by its companions, and more so when they found that many of its thoughts could not be grasped by them. What it allowed the others to know of what passed within it was to a large extent incomprehensible. No one knew how to judge the Red Brain, but much had been expected from it.

Thus, when the Red Brain sent forth its announcement, the others formed a huge circle around, their minds passive and open for the explanation. Thus they lay silent, while awaiting the discovery. And thus they reclined, completely unprepared for what followed.

For, as the Red Brain hung in the air, it began a slow but restless swaying; and as it swayed, its thoughts poured out in a rhythmic chant. High above them it towered, a smooth, slender column, whose lofty end was moving ever faster and faster while nervous shudders rippled up and down its length. And the alien chant became stronger, stronger, until it changed into a wild and dithyrambic pæan to the beauty of the past, to the glory of the present, to the splendor of the future. And the lay became a moaning praise, an exultation; a strain of furious joy ran through it, a repetition of, "The Red Brain has conquered the Dust. Others have failed, but he has not. Play the national anthem in honor of the Red Brain, for he has triumphed. Place him at your head, for he has conquered the Dust. Exalt him who has proved himself the greatest of all. Worship him who is greater than Antares, greater than the Cosmic Dust, greater than the Universe."

Abruptly it stopped. The puzzled Brains looked up. The Red Brain had ceased its nodding motion for a moment,

and had closed its thoughts to them. But along its entire length it began a gyratory spinning, until it whirled with incredible speed. Something antagonistic suddenly emanated from it. And before the Brains could grasp the situation, before they could protect themselves by closing their minds, the will-impulses of the Red Brain, laden with hatred and death, were throbbing about them and entering their open minds. Like a whirlwind spun the Red Brain, hurtling forth its hate. Like half-inflated balloons the other Brains had lain around it; like cooling glass bubbles they tautened for a second; and like pricked balloons, as their thoughts and thus their lives were annihilated, since thought was Life, they flattened, instantaneously dissolving into pools of evanescent slime. By tens and by hundreds they sank, destroyed by the sweeping, unchecked thoughts of the Red Brain which filled the hall; by groups, by sections, by paths around the whole circle fell the doomed Brains in that single moment of carelessness while pools of thick ink collected, flowed together, crept onward, and became rivers of pitch rushing down the marble floor with a soft, silken swish.

The hope of the universe had lain with the Red Brain.

And the Red Brain was mad.

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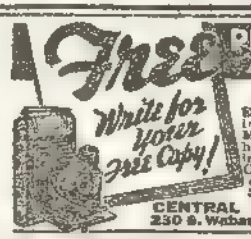


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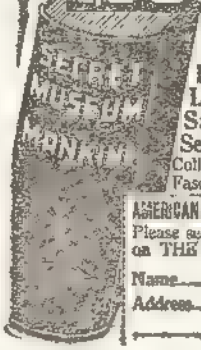


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THE response to Julius Hopkins' suggestion, voiced by him in the Eyrie of our March issue, that it would be a good thing for the readers of this magazine to form WEIRD TALES clubs in the various cities, has been quite favorable. Such clubs, Mr. Hopkins points out, would make the reading of stories from WEIRD TALES more enjoyable by group discussions of their merits; would stimulate interest in weird stories; and would lead to the radio broadcasting of those of our stories that lend themselves to radio dramatization, and to their production in the movies. They would also develop new authors from among the members of the WT clubs. If any of you are interested in organizing or joining such clubs in your city, drop a line to the editor and we will gladly do all in our power to assist you in organizing or joining such a club.

### From Nova Scotia

J. Mackay Tait, of Bridgetown, Nova Scotia, writes: "I hate to see Howard's serial, *The Hour of the Dragon,* draw to a close. I think he is a splendid imaginative writer and I fail to understand the occasional adverse criticisms of his work that appear in the Eyrie. I am glad to note his popularity with your readers. *The Black Abbot of Puthuum,* by Clark Ashton Smith, was, in my opinion, the best of this month's stories (March number)."

### Straight Out of Modern Times

Ronal Kayser writes from Chicago: "When Julius Hopkins' suggested WT Clubs cover the land, and the first national conclave is held, I want the floor for a moment to say my piece about Doctor Satan—and his creator, the Edgar Wallace of the weird story, Paul Ernst. I notice many Eyrie-ites do not go for these tales. I do! Yes, I like Clark Ashton Smith, whose pages are fulgurant with the art of a jeweler working with antique gems; Robert E. Howard, whose narrative is as broad as a tide; Edmond Hamilton, Wandreis both, Quinn. One imagines these men writing in deserted monasteries, inscribing their words on tomes of papyrus, belonging to a time-lost world. Paul Ernst writes straight out of modern times. A street blazes with sunshine; boats sail, lovers sit on park benches, trolleys rattle, policemen swing their clubs, stenographers paint their lips in elevators, scientists stare into test-tubes, rich old gentlemen doze at their club windows. Suddenly another note is struck; there appears a figure in a black coat with a black hat pulled low. The scene changes. Electric lights wink in the night-dark streets, the portholes of the ships are electric necklaces, and it is dark about the park benches. Again the note strikes; louder, now; and it is struck again, until slowly modern times dissolve into the marvelous atmosphere of the story. Another figure appears: it is Keane, like a ray of intelligence penetrating the darksome fog. But this figure illuminates the mist the more terribly! Two magnificent conceptions enclose the reader. First, we are privileged to watch Satan transmute ordinary life—the life we all know—into a fantasmagoria of weird effects rivaling anything that Conan (for example) has ever known. Then, Ernst dares to probe the fantasmagoria with the ultra-scientific Ascott Keane. It is as if a magician were to invite us onto the stage to inspect at close range his necromancy instead of keeping us safely across the footlights. It takes a master hand to create the world of the weird at all. It takes a finer hand to begin with the prosaic and everyday world and plunge it into rust and ruin and shade. What shall we say of Ernst, who succeeds in doing all this and then goes yet a step beyond—and dares bring the consum-

mate spirit of modernism, Keane, into the realm of the un-Real? It is as if Poe and Doyle had sat down to a duel of imagination; if Poe would have chanced the gamble of his spectral shapes against Sherlock Holmes—if Holmes would have gambled his earth-born wit against the supernal and the sorcerous specters!"

### Here She Is Again

Gertrude Hemken, of Chicago, writes: "Iss jus' me again—try to get rid of me!—jes' you try!!!! *The Albino Deaths* was just so-so. Somehow it was too abrupt. Sounded too much like a first edition of a local mystery—of facts that must be ascertained later. Now *The Crystal Curse* was something really worth telling grandma about. It may have been a curse—but it made a doggone fine story—as is quite usual of the brothers Binder. I have never read a story yet regarding gems—a story of gem mesmerism—and above all blue sapphires—they are so lovely. The Binder family is talented, as you mention—Jack Binder drew the picture for the story. It is a nice picture. The whole work is satisfactory. I felt amply repaid after having read *The Crystal Curse*. . . . Clark Ashton Smith seems to be adding some new angles to his writings. They are ever so much more interesting. His former stories used to chase chills along my spine—now I just curl up and read avidly. *The Black Abbot of Puthuum* was such a tale. I am well satisfied with C. A. Smith! Conan grows more and more tense in each issue. I almost hate to see it end. But then, there is always the promise of more Conan stories in the future. . . . *The Masterpiece of Crime* was a real masterpiece of crime. Even the poor criminal dwelt under the delusion that he was innocent. No more room, so thassall."

### WT Club for the "Sticks"

W. W. Green, Jr., of Washington, Kansas, writes: "It was with great interest that I read the letter by Mr. Julius Hopkins in the new issue of WEIRD TALES in regard to the forming of a Weird Tales Club. I am very much in favor of this idea and it is my belief that you will find that the majority of your subscribers are of the same opinion. However, there is one point which Mr. Hopkins has not touched which I think could be well called to the attention of the readers interested in this plan. Mr. Hopkins' idea


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is to bring the WT fans in each city together by the aid of this organization. Well and good. But what about the countless other readers and fans like myself who live in the 'sticks'? It would be of little value to us, I am sure, unless some provision is made. Now here is my suggestion: Why not print a membership list of all members which will list the names and addresses, same to be supplied to all regular subscribers who belong to the club? Then those of us living in small towns who cannot actually get together can at least keep in touch with each other by correspondence, which I believe would be very satisfactory to all concerned. I believe I mentioned the idea of having a means of correspondence brought about in a letter I wrote to the Eyrie some time ago. . . . I trust that the WT Club may soon be a reality."

### For Weirder Covers

Charles H. Bert, of Philadelphia, writes: "That's a great idea voiced by Julius Hopkins. In fact, months ago, I wondered why WEIRD TALES didn't take the initiative and form such a club, noticing the success of the Science Fiction League. Now a reader comes with the idea. Well, why not? Like Julius Hopkins, I'm positive it would be a howling success. I have been a reader of WEIRD TALES for the last six years, and in that time I have read them all. I would gladly volunteer as a temporary director of the Philadelphia chapter; until enough members get together to choose a permanent director. Now for a few pertinent remarks. The name of the club as Hopkins stated in his letter would be the Weird Tales Club. This name isn't appropriate. It would be better to call it the Weird Fiction Guild. Since weird authors will be members, and since they turn out weird stories of fine craftsmanship, calling it a guild instead of a club would be more correct. . . . It's almost impossible to choose the three best stories in the March issue. *The Crystal Curse* by Eando Binder is a gem. The watch-fob sapphire, used as a focal point to another dimension of space, was clever. Jack Binder turns out his best illustration since *The Last Hieroglyph*. Hamilton turns out his best story since his *Murder in the Grave*. *In the World's Dusk* is impressively told and well written; or, I should say, better written than most of his stories. It doesn't overstep the bounds of reason when you consider the marvelous advances science has made in the last decade. It is grim humor of the last survivor of the human race attempting to defy the inexorable march of a dying world to its tragic conclusion. *The Ship That Committed Suicide* by A. J. Mordtmann is worthy to take third place, despite its fascinating impossibility. Stories of the sea are rare, and this one was one of the best. *The Graveyard Rats* by Henry Kuttner is reminiscent of *The Burial of the Rats* by Stoker (although different) and some of the earlier stories of Lovecraft. Kuttner is a promising young writer. Kuttner's story would have probably been more convincing without the crawling dead-alive man. This is the only objection I have to an otherwise good story. Smith is up to his usual high standard. Finlay's illustrations are exquisitely well done and are the best I've ever seen in WEIRD TALES. I'm protesting against those 'whipping scene covers', the fourth in two years to disgrace our magazine. Either Brundage hasn't the ability to choose a good incident from a story; or is it the fault of the editor? *The Crystal Curse* is replete with incidents that would make a fine cover; so are the other stories. Therefore, I'm putting in a vote for *weirder* covers. I have no objections to the nudes; on the contrary, I like them. Now for a few remarks on the February issue. I like Frank Owen's *The Man Who Would Not Die*, very much. He seems to capture the age-old fatalism and the deep wisdom of the Chinese in his stories, and this one was up to his usual standard. By all means get more from Owen. The other stories in the issue are good, except *Coils of the Silver Serpent*, which you foolishly advertised as 'a tale of a thousand thrills.' A snake chasing a stupid cop up the street doesn't sound weird to me, and I don't think it sounds weird to you either."

### From a New Reader

Ivan Funderburgh, of Huntington, Indiana, writes: "I am a new reader of WEIRD TALES, but that doesn't mean I have read no weird fiction. Here are my impressions of the February issue: The cover—nothing extra. The colors are good. Pretty good art work on the girl and the serpent, but the rest——! Please, no nude covers! You have good, clean literature, but nobody'd believe it to look at the covers. A reader is ashamed to buy a copy on the news stands. *Coils of*

*the Silver Serpent*—poor. Not weird fiction. Detective and horror stories don't belong in WEIRD TALES. The poems in general—good. *Yoala*—excellent. The first half is splendid science-fiction and the last half is very good weird fiction. More Moore! *Wife of the Dragon-fly*—very good. It could be worked out more in detail. *The Man Who Would Not Die*—poor. The explanation at the end ruined an otherwise fair story. Is this the Frank Owen that draws those very humorous cartoons for Collier's? [No, that is a different Frank Owen, though they both live in the same city.—THE EDITOR.] *The Hour of the Dragon*—very good adventure. Not quite weird fiction. Where and when is the story supposed to take place? You see, I missed the first installment. *Norn*—fair. It starts out slow, but ends nicely. The shorts—all good. If these are new authors, they deserve praise. *The Temple*—good. Lovecraft can write much better. Next month's line-up looks very good. Two science-fiction stories coming. Whoopee! E. Hamilton is my favorite science-fiction author. I am anxiously awaiting C. A. Smith's fantasyarn."

### Henry Kuttner's Story

Robert Bloch writes from Milwaukee: "Got the March issue today, and Kuttner's story appealed to me strongly. I deem it a fine little tale in the Lovecraftian manner. He seems to be able to *appreciate* the horror of the situations he writes; there is an atmosphere of impinging menace that is positively *gloating*. A nice little yarn, indeed, in an issue further fortified with the Binderian tale and Clark Ashton Smith's story, so finely illustrated by Virgil Finlay. I am greatly pleased to hear that this artist is illustrating my two pieces. His work is absolutely beautiful."

### Julius Hopkins' Plan Applauded

James N. Mooney, of Culver City, California, writes: "I think that the idea advanced by Julius Hopkins, in the March issue, is great. I have waited for a long while for something like it to be broached in the Eyrie. At present I am a member of the Science Fiction League, a very fine organization, but for some reason at meetings of the chapters, under the league, fantastic, gruesome and weird fiction discussion seems to be passed over, or not bothered with at all.


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The Weird Tales Club will give the lovers of the bizarre and unusual a chance to discuss weird tales in their own way. . . . As to age, I really don't think that any limit should be drawn, as many of your most loyal readers are under the limit suggested by Mr. Hopkins. Important additions I think would be a club library, and membership certificates with member's names on them."

### A Volunteer for Philadelphia

Lillian Kaltz, of 1312 N. Franklin St., Philadelphia, writes: "I have just this moment finished reading Mr. Julius Hopkins' idea of a WT Club and it is a gem of an idea. I had the pleasure of meeting him in Washington, D. C., and he is most capable for being president of the Washington club. I would like to volunteer my services for starting a Philadelphia club of WT readers. I have been reading WT since a little girl, although I have never subscribed, preferring to patronize the neighborhood store. It would please me immensely if you would accept my services in starting a Philadelphia club."

### No Age Limit

Charles A. Madle, of Philadelphia, writes: "Three cheers for Julius Hopkins. His idea of a WT Club is very good. Most of his suggestions are good, but a few are, so to speak, not so hot. The suggestion that stands out in my mind as being poor is the age requirement. Possibly he does not realize many enthusiastic weird fiction fans are under eighteen years of age. Outside of this and one or two others, the plan is excellent."

### An Old Reader Returned

Irene Pierce, of National City, California, who signs herself "an old reader returned," writes: "Noticed a new illustrator in a recent issue of WEIRD TALES. He's very good; as good, in his particular style, as Hugh Rankin Remember, the poetry, illustrations, and short stories are what kept WT what it has never ceased being—that is, *weird*."

### Howard, Moore, Smith, Quinn

Eleanor Layton, of Washington, D. C., writes, in part: "Howard gets better and better; Conan is superb, magnifique, and more! Moore's characters, Smith and Jirel, are wonderful companions in perilous adventure. Smith and Lovecraft are delightfully productive of chills, as always. Keep WEIRD TALES up to the mark; detective stories and stories with a natural explanation are not weird. Jules de Grandin is always excepted from adverse criticism of detective stories."

### Our March Reprint

Paul S. Smith, of Orange, New Jersey, writes: "The story I enjoyed most in the March issue is the reprint, *A Masterpiece of Crime*. The plot is unusually ingenious, and the problem of solving the murders would almost baffle Sherlock Holmes himself if he had to view the puzzle from the outside instead of from the inside, as the reader does. An author who can devise such a strikingly clever plot as this certainly deserves the highest praise and admiration."

### Not a Pen Name

A. B. Correll, of West Hollywood, California, writes: "Pardon my taking a busy editor's time, but I wanted you to know that I consider the March issue of WEIRD TALES one of the best in ages. *The Crystal Curse* seemed unusually good, and *The Black Abbot of Puthuum* was remarkably vivid and real. All the yarns, in fact, were interesting—and well illustrated, into the bargain. I must except *The Albino Deaths*, which was scarcely weird; however, to soften this brick-bat, *The Graveyard Rats* is my idea of a *real* weird story. I never heard of the author before; is he a regular contributor under a pen name? If so, and it's not giving away secrets, I wish you would let me know what other name he writes under, so I can watch for his stuff. Best wishes for your continued success, and anticipating other issues, equally as good as March's." [No, Henry Kuttner is not a pen name. He is a young writer, for whom we predict real achievement; for he possesses genuine merit. —THE EDITOR.]

### The Weird Tales Clubs

Donald Allgeier, of Springfield, Missouri, writes: "I was quite interested in Julius Hopkins' proposal in your recent issue. However, I am not so sure that his plan will work. Such clubs are all right if they have strong backing and a definite purpose in view. But often they are formed only to enable the members to obtain and wear some sort of badge and to correspond with each other for any purpose at all. If this club is a really live and purposeful body I shall be in favor of it. In any event, if it is organized

I shall do whatever I can to help. But I would advise waiting until a great number of readers have offered their support to the movement. Do not think me pessimistic. I merely feel that careful consideration and definite planning should precede such an attempt. The ultra-short story *The Graveyard Rats* takes first place in March. It is a uniquely atmosphered and downright shuddery yarn. Let's have more like it. *The Crystal Curse* gets second place. Let's make the Binder brothers permanent members of WT'S writing staff. Of course *The Hour of the Dragon* rates high—third place, this time. It's about the best Conan yet. *Beyond Death's Gateway* was decidedly weird and fantastic, but I think the author went too far this time in striving for the right effect. The picture of the world beyond is wofully unconvincing. The story reminds one of the old-fashioned fairy-tale. Ernst can do really great work and I wish he would forget Doctor Satan. *The Albino Deaths* is not exactly out of place, but it is not the best type of weird story. It is a rather swift-moving, exciting action story. . . . The ultra-shorts were excellent. February was a fine issue, though marred with a few stories of the blood and thunder type—the type that tries to be weird and can't. Ernst was much better here and Moore good as usual. It's nice to see Owen again. Best of the shorter yarns was *A Dream of Death.*"

### A Welcome Departure

F. A. McVeigh, of Brooks, Alberta, writes: "I have been an avid reader of your magazine ever since its first appearance and I wish to congratulate you upon the continued improvement that each succeeding issue shows. A magazine of this nature is a welcome departure from the flood of western and detective publications that swamp the shelves of all dealers, to say nothing of the supposedly true story stuff that is disseminated."

### Norn

Charles H. Deems IV, of Hill Top, Arkansas, writes: "Cover designs on the February and March numbers are among the best I've ever seen; the soft colors are marvelous and life-like. *Norn* by Lireve Monet, in the former issue, is an ideal weird tale. Horror and weirdness run rife in the story, but only the impression, the feeling or suggestion of abnormal or supernormal is present. The


*NEXT MONTH*

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basicness of *Norn* is not a physical reality, but rather a spiritual or mind base, which makes it the ideal weird tale. . . . *Wife of the Dragon-fly* by Paul Ernst was a fine story; let's have more stories of strong will-power. In the March issue, *In the World's Dusk* by Edmond Hamilton is my favorite story. I thought it had an ironic ending. *The Crystal Curse* by Eando Binder is a strange tale and a great story."

### Weird Tales Improves

William D. Laffler, of Monroe, Louisiana, writes: "WEIRD TALES seems to be improving. I like your artists, especially Virgil Finlay and James Napoli. The covers are all right, but I would like to see Napoli or Doolin's depiction of a cover. Your run of stories are very good. Edmond Hamilton, Seabury Quinn, and Paul Ernst are your best writers. Don't let your readers tell you that the Doctor Satan stories aren't weird. Tell them to look the word up in the dictionary. By the way, is Paul Ernst the German author who wrote *Okkultistische Novellen?* And where is Carl Jacobi? He has the earmarks of becoming another Poe. I was very sorry to learn of the deaths of Arlton Eadie and Robert Nelson. I am afraid that you will never find a weirder story than *The Trail of the Cloven Hoof* by Eadie. *A Rival from the Grave* by Seabury Quinn was, in my opnion, the best story in the January issue." [No, Paul Ernst is not the German author you refer to. Ernst is an American through and through, and he lives, at present, in Pennsylvania.—THE EDITOR.]

### December Cover Inadequate

G. A. Robinson, of Kingston, Jamaica, writes: "Please permit me to make a criticism with reference to your cover illustration on the December number. All of us who have read about Conan realize that he is muscled like a Hercules, a giant with formidable thews; yet your illustrator has depicted him with the frame of an ordinary mortal, and has given him a face more in keeping with that of a society beau than the hard, handsome Hercules we have in our minds."

### Intriguing Covers

Cyril Plunkett, of Fremont, Ohio, writes: "Your covers are unique. In fact, they intrigued me so long that I finally found myself steadily buying WEIRD TALES. I didn't expect the stories to match the cover; but they did. I didn't expect to find myself particularly interested in this type of work; but I was. . . . Don't lose that nude cover girl. She reigns the news stands!"

### Most Popular Story

Readers, what stories do you like best in this issue? Write a letter, or fill out the vote coupon on this page, and send it to the Eyrie, WEIRD TALES. Your favorite story in the March issue, as shown by your votes and letters, was *The Crystal Curse*, by Eando Binder.

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| Story | Remarks |
|---|---|
| (1)---------- | ---------- |
| (2)---------- | ---------- |
| (3)---------- | ---------- |

**I do not like the following stories:**

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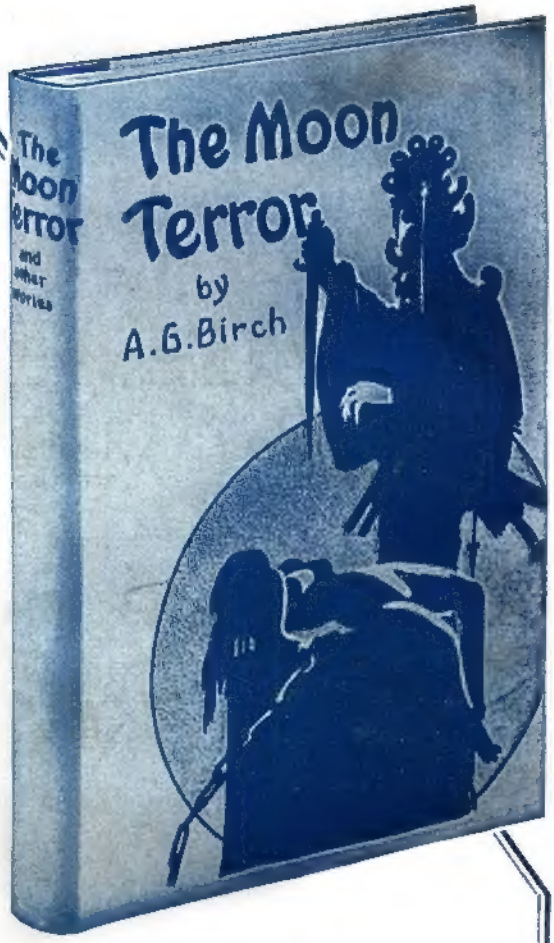


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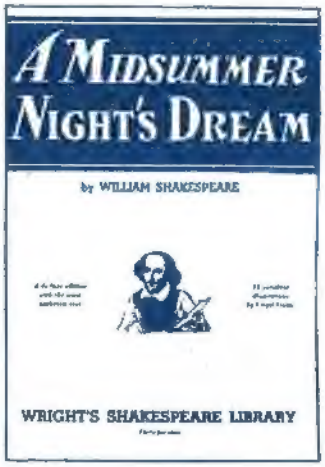


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